

MAKING THE PAST MEANINGFUL: Kwanzaa and the Concept of Sankofa

The African American holiday of Kwanzaa has become an important cultural practice among millions of African American peoples throughout world African community. This is a narrative of the process of conceptualizing and institutionalizing Kwanzaa, its emergence in the thrust toward re-Africanization during the Black Power Movement of the 60's, its relationship to the Black liberation struggle, the development and meaning of its symbols, and its communitarian vision and values as expressed in the core values of Kwanzaa, the Nguzo Saba.

by Maulana Karenga

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The creation of the holiday Kwanzaa is rooted in and reflective of the 60's liberation movement, the conception of my role as an activist-scholar and, the vanguard role of my organization Us as a cultural nationalist structure dedicated to creating, recreating and circulating African culture and the struggle for a just and good society.

As an activist-scholar in the 60's, I had felt a profound need to use my knowledge in the service of the people, and make it available to the masses to improve and enrich their lives. This commitment to serve came from the life and lessons of great men and women I admired and studied, and from the lessons and expectations of people from my childhood. Our mother and father, our immediate and extended family, our friends, our public school teachers, and the sheltering ancient oaks we called "old folks" and "elders" all expected and predicted that I would do something of lasting value to serve our people and honor our family.

With this in mind, in 1965 I left the University of California, Los Angeles and the doctoral program in political science with

a specialization in African Studies. I began to organize and teach in the community, sharing my knowledge, shaping circumstances, and searching after what would be good for the future. My activities expanded after the Watts Revolt of 1965, a turning point in the Movement and a point of departure for my involvement in "the struggle."

I had worked in the civil rights movement earlier, demonstrating against chain-stores with segregation policies in the South, and assisting in fundraising, rallies, and forums on and off campus on the meaning and goals of the struggle. The Revolt became a sign and symbol for the need to turn inward, establish community control, acquire, and practice what came to be called Black Power. I defined the goals of the Black Power Movement as a collective thrust to achieve and maintain three things: (1) self-determination (freedom in the general sense and community control in a specific sense), (2) self-respect (self-understanding and self-appreciation rooted in paradigms from our own culture), and (3) self-defense, (the collective capacity to end existing oppression and abuse,

and prevent future oppression and abuse by the state, especially by the police).

The urgency of this project was underlined by the assassination and sacrifice of Malcolm X, and the models of liberation by African countries. The Revolt illuminated and framed the issues in the discourse of power. The central message was that students like me had a special obligation to work on the project as we were, more idealistic, less economically vulnerable and less restrained by the demands of daily life. We agreed that we must dare to struggle, win, and build the new moral community we wanted to live in.

To do my work and to achieve something of lasting value, I created two basic instruments, an organization called Us and a theory called **Kawaida**. The name Us was chosen to indicate two things: the communitarian views, values, and practice of the organization and our commitment to us as a people distinct from them, the rulers of the established order. **Kawaida**, in Swahili means tradition, but in the context of its theory, it refers to an ongoing synthesis of tradition and reason directed toward cultural grounding and social change. Within this framework I conceived the project of Kwanzaa and enumerated the **Nguzo Saba**, (The Seven Principles) the core of its conception and practice.

From 1965 on, the expression and process of the

Movement was essentially Black Power. One of its central tenets was the need to "return to the source," to get "Back to Black," in a word, to return to all things African, especially the most important things. The focus was on recovery, reconstructing African culture, reappropriating it, and reaffirming it as a living tradition. In this context cultural practices such as renaming oneself and one's children with African names; wearing the natural or Afro hair style and African clothes such as the buba, kanga and dashiki; relearning and learning African languages, especially Swahili; and reinstating African life-cycle ceremonies such as naming (**Kutaja jina**), nationalization (**Akika**), wedding (**Arusi**), and passing (**Maziko**), were and are developed.

Within this thrust for re-Africanization, Black Studies was established in the academy, and the network of community institutions to restore and reinforce African culture was expanded. These institutions included cultural centers, independent schools, theaters, art galleries, and brotherhood and sisterhood formations. Re-Africanization also involved a return to Africa itself for cultural and spiritual revitalization, and the reestablishment of mutually beneficial relationships and exchanges. At the core of this commitment to re-Africanization was the attempt to recover and recommit oneself to learning and living African values as an indispensable way to rebuild and reinforce family, community, and culture. Kwanzaa as an

institutionalized cultural practice serves as a central way of reappropriating and reaffirming African culture.

I moved to this position and became a leader of this movement for several reasons. First, the civil rights struggle had revealed the weaknesses of ideas about assimilation. Certainly, we all wanted desegregation, but I and others rejected integration. Desegregation would destroy barriers to the exercise of rights and free exchange, but integration, as I read it, assumed that we as persons and a people wanted and needed to be with whites to achieve and fulfill ourselves. This, I rejected of necessity. Second, I began to conclude that cultural pluralism was the best way to achieve quality relationships and mutually beneficial and cooperative exchanges in society. I had championed cultural pluralism in a letter to the editor in 1960 in the *Daily Collegian* at Los Angeles Community College. Then, my position was a liberal cultural pluralist one. Now, I advocated a cultural nationalist pluralism. Third, I emphasized re-Africanization because I perceived that cultural identity was the most fundamental way to understand and realize oneself. One's concept of humanity is inescapably tied to the cultural paradigms. As an African, I chose to understand and realize myself in and through African culture.

I embraced this position with greater fervor when I discovered the rich, varied, and ancient character of African culture. As an intellectual, I had

been surfeited with and turned off by the Eurocentric approach to human knowledge. It seemed at one point that all subjects taught were openly or surreptitiously long and boring self-congratulatory narratives of Europe and European peoples. I needed to know and understand my culture and the cultures of other peoples of color, but especially my own. So, I detached myself from schools and the circles of associates and friends from the civil rights movement and turned inward and toward Africa. I found, in both continental and diasporan African cultures, models of human achievement and human possibility that informed my conception of self, the good life, and the just, good society. Within this context I began my process of re-Africanization, returning to my own history and culture and building structures and processes to achieve and spread my views.

My organization Us formed the vanguard in the re-Africanization process. Us argued that culture is the key crisis and challenge in Black life. Moreover, Us maintained that the crisis is solved and the challenge met by self-consciously overturning oneself, by institution-building and by the social struggle which reshape persons, culture, and aids in the creation of a just and good society. Us linked the improvement and enrichment of African American life to the rescue and reconstruction of its culture and the struggle to reshape, reappropriate, and create a new society.

This position was argued within movement organizations. Some organizations argued for strength through education; others for economic development; and still others for "picking up the gun." We maintained that all these ways were necessary but not sufficient because what was needed, as Fanon said, was a total solution on the objective as well as the subjective level. Such a solution required culture, i.e., the totality of thought and practice of a people. We concluded that we could find guns anywhere, especially in the hands of the oppressor. What was necessary, was for the people themselves to decide that struggle itself is necessary and then determine and develop their means. Thus, we argued for a cultural revolution to create a new logic and language of liberation and new institutions to house and advance our aspirations.

We understand that the stress on culture would justify itself if it were inclusive enough to deal with the demands of daily life and struggle. Therefore, **Kawaida** theory defined culture in its fullest sense as the totality of thought and practice by which a people creates itself, celebrates, sustains and develops itself, and introduces itself to history and humanity. It occurs at least in seven fundamental areas: history, religion (spirituality and ethics), social organization, economic organization, political organization, creative production (art, music, literature,

dance), and ethos, i.e., the collective psychology which results from practice in the other six areas of culture.

Kawaida maintains that the quality of social practice is directly related to the quality of the cultural views and values which inform and ground it. Values are defined as categories of commitment and priorities which enhance or diminish human possibilities. What one considers important and places first in one's life determines the quality and direction of one's life with both persons and peoples.

These assumptions about culture and values led me to study African cultures and ask what was the social cement that held these societies together and gave them their humanistic character? Moreover, how could I make these ancient traditions live again? How could I use and teach others to use the past to inform and give foundation to the present and future? How could I use the lessons of the past to move effectively in the history we now live?

My conclusion was that the core of humanistic African culture is its communitarian values, values which reaffirm and reinforce community and human flourishing. The challenge was to assemble a set of communitarian values which reflected both the best of African tradition and modern ethical reasoning to establish a core set of values for the African community. Moreover, they had to be values that spoke to the needs of the community and the demands of the struggle. Values that would enhance the people's

sense of identity, purpose, and direction and support their efforts to live free, full, and meaningful lives. Such a set of values would have to have been conceptually elastic to allow for rich and varied interpretations to accommodate the diversity of thought and practice of African peoples, and represent a core value system that could be easily grasped and learned because of its manageable number and meaningful focus and message.

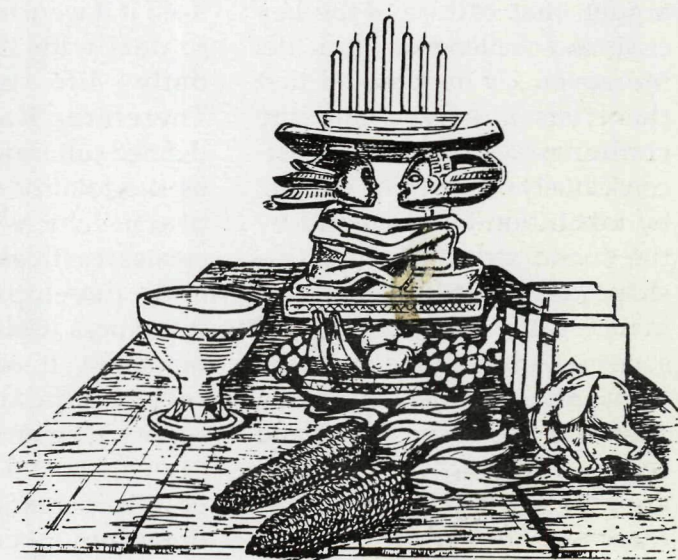
Sankofa, an **Akan** concept of historical recovery, literally means "return and retrieve it," but conceptually is more expansive. It requires a recovery, the result of intellectually rigorous, culturally grounded and future-focused research. What I wanted to do was not simply extract from the past but to discover and recover values that pose models of human excellence and suggest paradigms of human possibility. The practice of Sankofa requires constant dialog with African culture. A central self-understanding of **Kawaida** is that it seeks answers to the fundamental concerns of the African and human community to define the best of what it means to be both African and human. This dialog was conducted inside Us and with other African groups, institutions, and scholars, and in public and community forums with the masses. The central dialog was inside Us, for recovery and reconstruction of African culture and its use in enriching and expanding our lives as our central mission. Therefore, the struggle was not

simply to defeat our oppressor, but to imagine a new way of being human, and new paradigms of human relations and human society to bring into being. Paradigms of possibility for Us resided in the ancient and varied richness of African culture. In this context I conceived and put forth the **Nguzo Saba** (The Seven Principles) as a core Black value system which reaffirms and reinforces family, community and culture. I developed Kwanzaa as a fundamental way to introduce, institutionalize, and spread these principles. **Kawaida** theory and the **Nguzo Saba** gave form and substance to Kwanzaa, making it a fundamental mode of cultural recovery and reconstruction.

Kwanzaa was created first as a fundamental way to rescue and reconstruct African culture in the midst of a movement for re-Africanization. It was to recover a valuable and ancient way of building family and community, shaped so it spoke to current needs and aspirations as a paradigm of possibility. Secondly, I created it to introduce the **Nguzo Saba** (The Seven Principles) and to reaffirm the

centrality of communitarian values in building and reaffirming family, community and culture. Kwanzaa was also created to serve as a regular communal celebration which reaffirmed and reinforced the bonds between us as African people both nationally and internationally. And finally, Kwanzaa was created as an act of self-determination as a distinct way of being African in the world. It was conceived as a cultural project, as a way to speak a special African truth to the world by recovering lost models and memory, reviving suppressed principles and practices of African culture, and putting them in the service of the struggle for liberation and ever higher levels of human life.

The first celebration in 1966 was essentially an organizational celebration with guests and friends of Us. It set the pattern for subsequent celebrations which I outlined in a typed paper and sent around the country to other nationalist



organizations. The process included ingathering, rituals of thanksgiving; remembrance and recommitment; and celebrations of the good. As an intellectual I was always concerned with laying groundwork and setting forth a clear and definite framework, but I was equally concerned with allowing flexibility for developmental change as distinct from destructive change. In 1966, I put forth the basic framework and content of the Kwanzaa celebration. It anticipated and allowed for changes that reaffirmed its basic principles and lessons, and enriched and expanded celebrants' understanding, appreciation, and practice of the holiday.

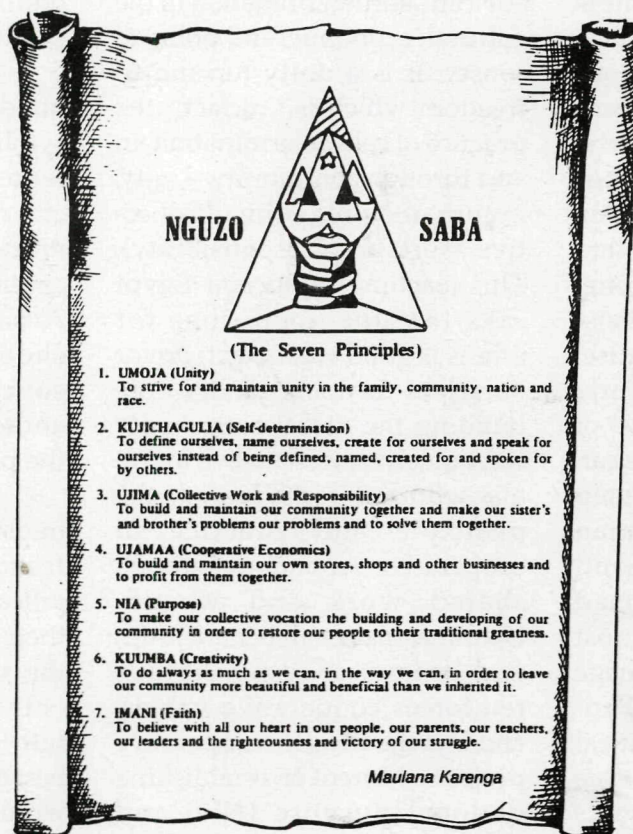
As Kwanzaa developed, I continuously stressed the need for thinking and talking about Kwanzaa as a way to reaffirm and reinforce family, community and culture. This way of approaching Kwanzaa as reaffirmation and reinforcement serves at least two purposes. First, it does not deny strengths African peoples already have but stresses the ongoing need to expand on these. As Nkrumah says, we must "go to the people; start with what they know and build on what they have." Thus, Kwanzaa seeks to reaffirm and reinforce the internal strengths of the people by emphasizing communitarian life-affirming, struggle-supporting and achievement-

encouraging values which come from our own culture.

Second, to stress Kwanzaa's drawing and building on the best of our culture is to reaffirm the need to protect and expand it. If

own image and interests and pose a critical model of family, community, and culture. These Seven Principles are: 1) **Umoja** (Unity)—to strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation, and race, i.e., the world African community; 2) **Kujichagulia** (Self-Determination)—to define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves, and speak for ourselves instead of being defined, named for, and spoken for by others. As the ancient Egyptians taught, to think with our own mind, feel with our own heart, see with our own eyes, hear with our own ears, speak with our own mouth and walk with the strength and dignity of our own person; 3) **Ujima** (Collective Work and Responsibility)—to build and maintain our community together and make our sister's and brother's problems

our problems and to solve them together; 4) **Ujamaa** (Cooperative Economics)—to build and maintain our own stores, shops, and other businesses and to profit from them together. In a word, to share work and wealth, and build and control the economy of our community; 5) **Nia** (Purpose)—to make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their historical greatness; 6) **Kuumba** (Creativity)—to do



we respect African culture and above all African people, we must struggle to create the context in which both can flourish. While the vision, values, and practice of community strengthen the people, their own struggle will liberate them and lay the basis for a just and good society.

I posed the core values of Kwanzaa, the **Nguzo Saba**, as a system, a set of moral values by which the African community could reconstruct our lives in our

always as much as we can in the way we can to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it; and 7) **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. In a word, faith in ourselves, in our Creator, in our mothers and fathers, our sisters and brothers, our grandfathers and grandmothers, our elders, our youth, our future and faith in all that makes us beautiful and strong. We need faith in the righteousness and victory of our cause, faith that through hard work, long struggle, and a whole lot of love and understanding, we can and will self-consciously step back on the stage of human history as a free, proud, and productive people. I used Swahili because it is the most widely spread African language and thus represented the Pan-African character of my political and cultural vision. For this same reason my organization Us had introduced Swahili as the African language of the Movement and fostered its use in language classes; in naming persons; organizations and buildings; and in greetings and useful phrases.

I constructed the order of the principles to start with **Umoja** (Unity) and to end with **Imani** (Faith). I started with **Umoja** (Unity) because there is no family, community, or culture without unity. It is, of necessity, the beginning and continuing need. But then come questions of unity for what, around what values and practices, and how to

achieve unity in thought and practice? The other principles help explain the nature, purpose, and practice of unity. Unity for and through **Kujichagulia** (Self-Determination), and unity directed toward community and African self-determination in the cultural, economic, and political sense. It is a unity for and in freedom which is, in fact, the practice of self-determination, in and through community. Unity, in turn, requires **Ujima** (Collective Work and Responsibility). This teaching of ancient Egypt says that the good done for others is good we, in fact, do for ourselves. In doing good, we are building the moral community we, ourselves, want to live in. We also commit to **Ujamaa**, the principle and practice of cooperative economics through shared work and wealth. **Ujamaa** makes all beneficiaries and bearers of responsibility, reinforces cooperative values, and lays the basis for cooperative projects. Moreover, establishing national purpose (**Nia**) and reassessing and redefining it constantly is an imperative. This national purpose becomes our collective vocation as a people. It is important that it is always informed by our best moral vision and values. There is the challenge to always be creative, to act like the Creator, to constantly bring into being the good and the beautiful, and to strive to leave our community better and more beautiful than when we inherited it. This is the principle of **Kuumba**.

Finally, **Imani** (faith) is the principle from which all principles are drawn. We require

faith in ourselves and each other to constantly practice. Thus, we say, let us all and each have profound and continuing faith. We can and will return to our own history and self-consciously step back on the stage of human history as a free, proud, and productive people.

Kwanzaa like all other holidays requires symbols. The symbols, like the holiday itself, represent a synthesis of tradition and reason, ancient practice and modern engagement, and continental African culture and African American culture. In choosing symbols I was concerned with cultural authenticity and relevance for the present and the future.

Certainly, being in the midst of an historical struggle for freedom would have to be reflected in both the symbols and their interpretation. Moreover, the symbols had to reflect not only the demands of struggle, but reaffirm and reinforce the best of our cultural values. These would begin with the values and symbols of communitarian and first-fruit celebrations of which Kwanzaa was an expression.

Kwanzaa has seven basic symbols and two supplementary symbols. These traditional and modern symbols evolved out of the life and struggle of African American people. These basic seven symbols are: 1) **mazao** (crops); 2) **mkeka** (mat); 3) **kinara** (the candle holder); 4) **muhindi** (corn); 5) **zawadi** (gifts); 6) **kikombe cha umoja** (the unity cup); and 7) **mishumaa saba** (the seven candles). The two supplementary symbols are a poster or other representation of

the **Nguzo Saba** (The Seven Principles) and the **bendera ya taifa** (the national flag or standard).

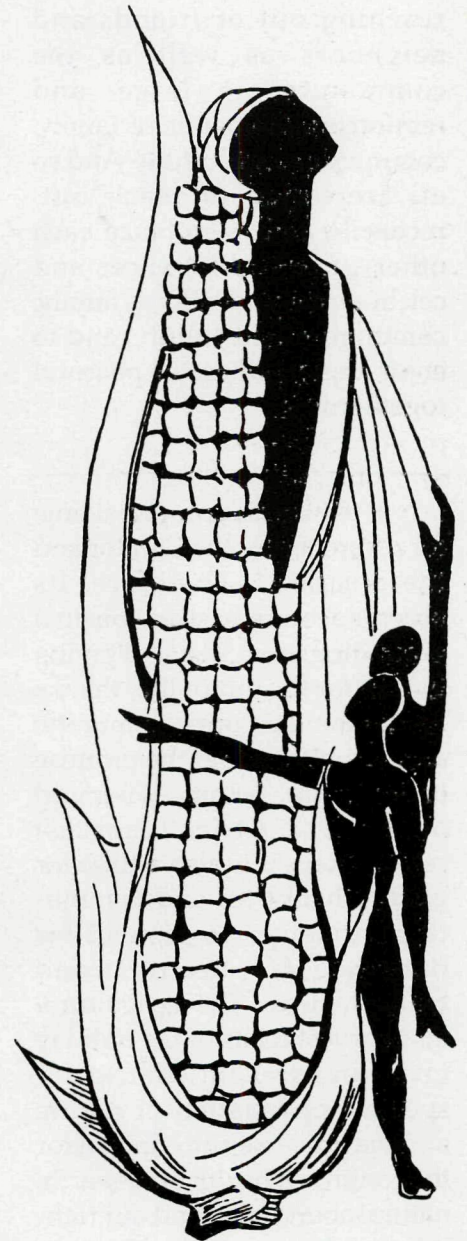
The first symbol the **mazao** (crops), represents the historical roots of the holiday itself and the rewards of collective productive labor. The concept of Kwanzaa, as a first-fruit celebration, has its roots in the communal agricultural celebrations of continental African peoples.

Mkeka (mat), the symbol of tradition and history, is the foundation for correct knowledge and understanding of self, society, and the world. Therefore, all other Kwanzaa symbols are placed on the **mkeka**, and it too becomes a foundation. The **kinara** (candle holder) is symbolic of our parent people, the continental Africans, our ancestors as a collective whole, both the African man and the African woman. The **muhindi** (corn) represents children and all the hopes and challenges attached to them. **Zawadi** (gifts) are symbolic of the seeds sown by the children (i.e., commitments made and kept) and of the fruits of the labor of the parents. **Kikombe** (the unity cup), or its full name—**kikombe cha umoja**, serves two basic functions. First, it is used to pour **tambiko** or libation for the ancestors, and second, it is the ritual drinking cup to reinforce unity in the family and community. The **mishumaa saba** or seven candles represent The Seven Principles which are the heart and spirit of Kwanzaa. The candles are placed securely in the **kinara**, the symbol of ancestry, to symbolize

the rootedness of the ancestral principles. The lighting of the candles is a daily ritual during Kwanzaa which symbolizes giving both light and life to the principles themselves and raising up light to lessen darkness in both the spiritual and intellectual sense, an ancient African concept. As the *Husia*, the sacred text of ancient Egypt says, "I have driven away darkness so that light could be lifted up."

Two supplementary symbols are the **Nguzo Saba** and the **bendera**. The **bendera** are the Black, Red, and Green colors given to us by the Hon. Marcus Garvey. In the 60's we reordered the colors and slightly adjusted their interpretation to correspond to our current needs. Thus, we said the colors are Black for the people, Red for our continuing struggle, and Green for the future we shall build out of struggle.

Kwanzaa is organized around five fundamental kinds of activities which reflect both its origin in the practice of first-fruit celebrations and its rootedness in communitarian values. Regardless of differences in language, name, and cultural location, Kwanzaa and other first-fruit celebrations revolve around these common activities. First of all, Kwanzaa is a time of ingathering of the people. It is a time to come together and reinforce the bonds between us as a people in spite of our diversity. Thus, Africans who are Muslim, Christian, Jew (Hebrew); followers of the ancient African traditions of **Yoruba, Maat, Dogon, Ashanti,**



Dinka, and other religious traditions celebrate Kwanzaa. It is a cultural holiday not a religious one. African culture is diverse and the home of innumerable religious traditions. Old and young reach across generations and embrace and find in Kwanzaa a common ground of heritage and promise. It is a special time for calling home all family members, reaching out of friends and neighbors as well as the community at large and reinforcing the bonds of family, community, and culture. And so all are urged to reach out; reconcile and re-embrace each other; forget differences and celebrate commonality as family, community, and culture; and to enjoy the goodness of peaceful togetherness.

Egyptians and other African peoples teach that the Divine, human and natural are linked; that harm to one is harm to all; and that good done to one must and does include good done for all. Thus African people remember and meditate on this, teach it, and cultivate the principle and practice of right relationships with the Divine, human and natural.

Kwanzaa is a special time of commemoration of the past. It provides an excellent context for teaching and celebrating the most ancient history and culture in the world—African history and culture. We remember Fannie Lou Hamer’s statement that there are two things we must

all “care about, never to forget where we came from and always praise the bridges that carried us over.” And thus we embrace Kwanzaa, a special time to teach the rich beauty of our history and to praise the great bridges who carried us over—Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Mary M. Bethune, Malcolm X, Ida B. Wells, Martin L. King, Anna J. Cooper, Marcus Garvey and others. We also praise the small and sturdy bridges who did not make the history books, wear kente cloth or speak an African language, but still taught us African values by teaching us to dare struggle, speak truth, do justice, and walk in the way of righteousness.

Kwanzaa is a special time for reverence for the Creator and the creation. Therefore, its observance emphasizes spiritual grounding; rejoicing, and giving thanks for the gift of life, thanks for our families, our community; and our culture and the promise of our future. Because it is based on ancient African harvest celebrations, it is also a time for giving thanks for and committing ourselves to respect for nature, its beauty and bountifulness. The agricultural and harvest focus of the holiday gives an excellent context for special appreciation of nature and the universe and concern for the continued health of the earth; natural abundance; and our right relationship with the Creator, humans and nature. The ancient



As a people conscious of our culture, we know both the meaning and value of memory, the moral obligation to raise and remember those who gave their lives, love, and labor so that we might live fuller, freer, and more meaningful lives. And we teach these to our families and community and honor the ancestors by living their best and most beautiful lessons. Moreover, we take seriously the obligation given us in the teachings of Mary McLeod Bethune who said "We are heirs and custodians of a great legacy," and we must bear the burden and glory of that legacy with strength, dignity and determination.

Kwanzaa is a time of recommitment to our highest ideals. It is a time of focusing on thought and practice of our highest cultural vision and values which in essence are ethical values—values of love, sisterhood, brotherhood, and respect for the transcendent, the human person, for elders, and nature. There the **Nguzo Saba** (The Seven Principles) serve as the central focus of Kwanzaa. These communitarian values are both cultural and ethical and enrich our lives as such.

We are, in the final analysis, defined by our values and the practice to which they lead. Thus, Kwanzaa teaches us to remember and act on the ancient African teachings of Maat which say, "Speak truth, do justice and walk in the way of righteousness." The **Husia** says we must always show preference for the most vulnerable among us, "give food to the hungry,

water to the thirsty, clothes to the naked and a boat to those without one." We must be "a father to the orphan, a husband to the widow, comfort to the sick and a staff of support for the aged, a shelter to the needy, a float for the drowning and a ladder for those trapped in the pit (of despair)."

In this special time of recommitment to our highest ideals, Kwanzaa is especially a time of sober assessment. The major day for this is on the last day of Kwanzaa, January first, but all through the holiday one is challenged to think about what it means to be African. Those rooted in African culture reaffirm that, above all, being African is being culturally and ethically grounded. Being committed to culture and its ethical core that teaches us to struggle for liberation constantly and ever higher levels of human life, to speak truth, do justice, love rightness, serve the people and realize that "everyday is a donation to eternity and even one hour is a contribution to the future."

We embrace Kwanzaa as a time to ourselves and to ask members of our families and others three basic questions which Frantz Fanon says we all have to ask and answer. They are: "Who am I?" "Am I really who I am?" and "Am I all I ought to be?" "Who am I?" is a question of identity. It reminds us we are an African people—fathers and mothers of humanity and human civilization who taught the world in the midst of Nile Valley civilization some of the basic disciplines of human

knowledge, sons and daughters of the Holocaust of Enslavement, and authors and heirs of the Reaffirmation of the Sixties. The question, "Am I really who I am?" is a question of authenticity, realness, genuineness. It reminds us not to mask our Africanness, distort our appearance, deny the rich and varied beauty of our people, or do anything that damages our inherent human dignity or demean our history as an African person and people.

The last question—"Am I all I ought to be?" is a question of ethical and historical obligation. It reminds us that as an African people who are fathers and mothers of human civilization, we must always strive for the highest level of achievement; that as sons and daughters of the Holocaust of Enslavement; we must oppose all forms of human oppression—especially racism, sexism, classism; all forms of enslavement, external and internal; and we must remember and honor the millions lost by completing their struggle for freedom and by living the full and meaningful lives they intended for us.

And finally, as authors and heirs of the Reaffirmation of the 60's, we must not let our oppressor be our teacher; we must create and put forth, out of our own understanding of our history and culture, a new paradigm of what it means to be human, of human relations, and of the just and good multicultural society.

Kwanzaa is a time for celebration of the good, the good of life, family, community,

culture, friendship, the bountifulness of the earth, the wonder of the universe, the elder, the young, the human person in general, our history, our struggle for liberation and ever higher levels of human life. Celebration is a ceremony, commemoration, a respectful marking, an honoring, a praising and a rejoicing. This and more is our holiday of Kwanzaa, ancient and modern thought and practice, a joyful achievement and an ongoing and unending promise.

Activities must be collective, cultural, and reaffirming and always honor to the dignity of our people and culture. The celebration of our history and struggle, our ancestors, our love, the awesome beauty of nature, the promise of life, and the achievement of hard work, are of necessity, called forth. Men and women who are rooted in their culture model and mirror the best of what it means to be African, and build a beautiful and beneficial future. They know that every word and act must teach and help us to move effectively in the history we are now living. These persons of culture know that Kwanzaa is part of that living history and rich tradition and play a vital role in celebrating and reaffirming the legacy of our history and the promise of our future.

Each year has seen the further growth of the holiday of Kwanzaa with an estimated 18 million African people celebrating it throughout the world African community. It

grows among African people in the U.S., Africa, Brazil and other countries of South America, Canada, the Caribbean, and Britain and other European countries. Last year it began in India. And the question is always raised, "why does it grow among African people?" The answer, of course, lies in how it speaks to them; serves their needs; and points to ways of celebrating, and reinforcing family, community and culture. In fact, as I have so often stated, Kwanzaa grows among African people because it speaks to their need and appreciation for its cultural vision and life-affirming values, values which celebrate and reinforce family, community, and culture. It grows because it represents an important way Africans speak their own special cultural truth in a multicultural world. It grows because it reaffirms a rich and ancient tradition which lays claim to the first religious, ethical, and scientific texts and the introduction of some of the basic disciplines of human knowledge in the Nile Valley. It grows because it reinforces our rootedness in our own culture in a rich and meaningful way. And it grows because it brings us together from all countries, all religious traditions, all classes, all ages and generations, and all political persuasions on the common ground of our Africanness in all its historical and current diversity and unity.

When I see the growth of Kwanzaa and its rootedness among African people, I am obviously pleased. It is clearly a celebration which millions

embrace as a cultural legacy of significant and lasting value. Therefore, it has become a work which contributes both to my self-definition and my self-understanding. Moreover, it stands as a central part of my overall work as an activist-scholar; my development of **Kawaida** theory and building the organization **Us** out of which Kwanzaa emerges; my work in the cooperative founding and development of Black Studies, including contributions to the concept of Afrocentricity and my pioneering work in ancient Egyptian ethical philosophy as a critical field in Africana Studies; my general Sankofa project of historical recovery and reconstruction as expressed in the development of rites of passage programs and other life-cycle rituals; the creation of the **Simba** Youth Movement as a model of possibility and promise; my political organizing and activities in and of Black united fronts and national leadership formations; and finally, my development of the **Nguzo Saba** which are used as a fundamental theoretical and value orientation in literally hundreds of organizations around the country. Certainly, I feel fortunate, even blessed, to see my work established and flourishing in my life time. For so many who deserved this did not see it. And yet I am always conscious of the fact that there is still so much more to do, because as the ancestors taught, "it is good to work for the future," because the "good we do for others we are actually doing for ourselves" and because "every

day is a donation to eternity and even one hour is a contribution to the future." □

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