

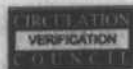
OPINION

THE CHRONICLE

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Celebrating Kwanzaa and community



Marian Wright Edelman

Guest Columnist

During the last week of December, many black families and communities observe Kwanzaa. Kwanzaa is a unique celebration because it's not a religious or national holiday but a cultural one. It doesn't celebrate a person or an event but a set of ideas. In a year when Americans have heard a lot about "values," values are what Kwanzaa is all about.

As Dr. Maulana Karenga, the originator of Kwanzaa, explains, "There is no way to understand and appreciate the meaning and message of Kwanzaa without understanding and appreciating its profound and pervasive concern with values. In fact, Kwanzaa's reason for existence, its length of seven days, its core focus and its foundation are all rooted in its concern with values." And the values Kwanzaa celebrates and asks people to live up to aren't about individual private behavior but the values a community needs to be strong and thrive.

The Nguzo Saba, or seven principles, are the framework of a Kwanzaa celebration. Dr. Karenga explains that they are the key building blocks of community in general. Each day during Kwanzaa focuses on one of these principles and reminds celebrants to recommit to that value: "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 brothers and sisters' 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. And 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."

Not everyone celebrates Kwanzaa but these values contain many universal principles for building strong communities. Kwanzaa ends on New Year's Day in the Kwanzaa celebration, the Day of Meditation. Many people already spend New Year's Day thinking about how they can resolve to improve themselves during the next year. But imagine if this year we all resolved to take steps to improve our communities instead. Imagine if every child in this nation were being raised in a community resolved to seeing any member's problems as everyone's problems and solving them together, or to making sure that all community members live together harmoniously and support each other in their common goals, or that every community decision would leave the community healthier and more beautiful tomorrow than it is today. What kinds of places would these communities be for our children and, by extension, for all of us?

During a traditional Kwanzaa celebration mshindi, ears of corn, are laid on a mkeke, a straw mat. The mat symbolizes African peoples' history and traditions, and the corn symbolizes children and the future. Families place one ear of corn on the mkeke for each child in the household, but they're instructed to put at least two ears down even if they don't have children, because in African tradition every adult is considered a parent to every child in the community. Many people talk about this belief, but imagine if every one of us really put it into action. And then imagine what kind of a world we could build for our children if our local, national, and global communities all committed to making it our most important community value.

During that final Day of Meditation in Kwanzaa, people are supposed to ask themselves three questions: "Who am I? Am I really who I say I am? And am I all I ought to be?" Everyone answers these questions as an individual, but their answers should reflect how well they are playing their part in making their community function as a whole and with justice. A person's success is deeply connected to how much value they are giving to others. At a time when our children desperately need adults to reweave the fabric of family and community for them, all of us need to think and ask ourselves these questions. Are we all that we ought to be?

Marian Wright Edelman is president and founder of the Children's Defense Fund and its Action Council.



Are you ready to bring back black?



James Clingman

Guest Columnist

I know I am. I am ready to connect with brothers and sisters who are unwavering and unapologetic when it comes to who they are and what their obligation is to our people. I am ready to stand shoulder to shoulder with black folks who are unafraid and unflappable when attacked from without and from within. I am ready to work with a new cadre of black leaders, not new in experience but new as it relates to their current unsung status, their active youth status, and new in respect to what they have done and are doing "under the radar screen" so to speak. There are many "new" leaders out there, and I am ready to follow them as we Bring Back Black.

The new book by W.D. Wright, "The Crisis of the Black Intellectual," which I highly recommend you read, contains the following passage on page 311: "Today there is no general black leadership and the black political body is fragmented, isolated, individualistic, fanciful, delusional, susceptible to posturing, and has no real sense of engaging with

black politics that are designed to help black people in America, specifically those millions still 'stuck at the bottom.' What could interrupt this situation and force blacks back to a general leadership and to a consciousness of black politics would be the emergence of new and differently oriented local black leaders. This would include some individuals drawn from those 'stuck at the bottom.' There are enough black local leaders, community organizers, and activists who could initiate this new and different leadership across the country and who could consciously and actively seek to recruit and train individuals 'up from varied misery' for local leadership."

The weekend of Dec. 8 was the first step on a journey some of us have taken before. It was the weekend when strong, dedicated, determined, and consciously black brothers and sisters gathered to begin the Bring Back Black movement. We came together because we know W.D. Wright is correct in his assessment of black leadership. We came together to find one another, to meet one another, to connect with one another, to support one another, and to work with one another.

The Bring Back Black gathering comprised stalwart and resolute black folks, some of who have been working for decades

empowering our people. No need to name them; they are not looking for the spotlight. No need to number them; they are not looking for accolades. This group, as well as those who wanted to be there but could not, simply works to overcome the psychological barriers that now prevent black people from moving forward together as well as individually.

They do their work quietly and without fanfare, in the same manner that Frederick Douglass described Harriet Tubman and the work she did. They work by building their own businesses, opening their own schools, and being serious about their political involvement. They do their work by meeting payrolls from which their black employees take care of their families. They do it by standing up and speaking out against injustice and inequity. They do it by sacrificing their time and their resources for the collective cause of black people. That's why they came to the Bring Back Black gathering, which was held in the city Kweisi Mfume called "ground zero," Cincinnati.

In the 1960's we had the Black Power Movement, in which our songs, our products, our language, our clothing, our hair, our gestures, and our love of self, displayed a new thought, a new resolve, and a new dedication. What happened to it? Those were the first stages of what could

have been a most powerful movement for black people. The remnants are still with us, but the substance of collective progressiveness and prosperity are far lacking.

So what do we do now? We seek and follow new leadership; we take more control of our children's education; we get serious about politics by playing to win rather than just playing to play; we take better care of our bodies; we use technology and commercial media, to its fullest, to tell our own story, because he who defines you controls you; we connect with our brothers and sisters in Africa, in Haiti, Jamaica, and other Caribbean islands, and in Brazil's Bahia, and in London, and throughout the world. And finally, but importantly, we pool some of our money and invest in our own projects.

Those are the things we did at our Bring Back Black meeting. Now, I ask you again: Are you ready to Bring Back Black?

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The Darfur crisis



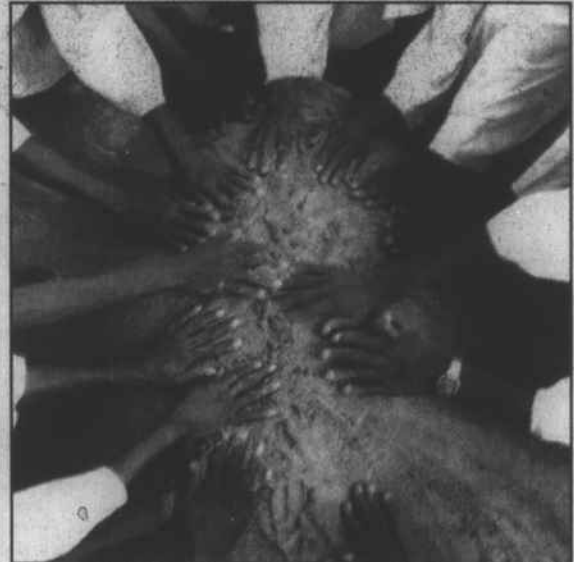
James Yates

Guest Columnist

Memo to George W. Bush (number 43): Why are we killing innocent Iraqi civilians when Osama Bin Laden is still on the loose in the mountains of Tora Bora? Why are we forcing democracy down the throats of people who obviously don't want it? Meanwhile, in the Sudan, nine-year-old girls are being gang-raped and sold as sex slaves by the vicious and unrepentant Janjaweed (the government sponsored militia of the Sudan). The oppressed black Africans who live in the Darfur region are without question living in one of the most gruesome hellholes on the face of this planet.

Atrocities are being committed against these native inhabitants, which are too gruesome and vile to be repeated on human lips. The Janjaweed are terrorizing these black Africans in a manner that would make the Nazi's of WWII cringe! Meanwhile, the U.S. State Department and the United Nations does nothing but sit on their hands and offer conciliatory lip service about possible sanctions and weak watered-down resolutions that offer no real solutions about how to stop the present bloody carnage. In other words, these resolutions not only have no bite, they have no teeth!

The international community turns a deaf ear to the plight of the Sudanese. This is a place where husbands are butchered in front of their wives and children. Where wives are gang-raped by up to 20 men in front of their children and in front of their husbands before the husbands are executed. This is a region in the world where some of the most despicable acts against



Muslim men cover the grave of 3-month-old in the Kalma refugee camp in the Darfur region of Sudan. The infant died of hunger-related causes.

humanity are being committed since Rwanda in the early 90's.

I believe I am righteous in my anger and indignation toward our government, the U.N., the news media, and even my fellow African-Americans for their weak response and casual attitude in regards to this humanitarian crisis. If it were not for the Red Cross, Doctors Without Borders, and a few other humanitarian organizations, this crisis would barely be on the radar screen. To these organizations I say, bless you.

This present administration has ticked me off to no end! For the Bush administration I have nothing but contempt. France, Germany and the rest of the European Union are just as much to blame as well. They use their disapproval of the war in Iraq as a smokescreen for their inaction. You've got to be kidding me!

The news media gives 30 seconds of coverage on MSNBC, CNN, or FOX News, and then

move on to another news story. You mean to tell me the media will show a ball player going into the stands to fight with fans every five seconds on the news, but can't take more than a few seconds and mention the biggest slaughter since Pol Pot (1978) and the Rwandan crisis (1993)? You guys (the media) disgust me!

It is estimated (USA Today, AP reports) that 10,000 people are dying each month on the parched desert landscape of Darfur and the world could care less. Many of these Africans are not even safe in refugee camps because they are either too filled to capacity, diseases such as cholera, dysentery, and TB run rampant; and because border countries like Chad and Libya are not willing to help their stricken neighbors.

I am absolutely appalled at the international community's lack of outrage on this matter!

I must say to the world; these crimes against humanity will be

punished by God, and the nations that sit idly by and do nothing will not escape the judgment!

I am in my mid 30's so I have a better idea of how the world operates than when I was an idealistic 21-year-old. I realize those men with money, power, capital, and other resources run this world. Throw in regional politics and corrupt bureaucrats, and you start to get a panoramic view of how world politics are played. Human lives mean nothing to these individuals (obviously). This is evident in the Darfur region, where children are maimed and their limbs cut off for nothing.

My guess is that Southwest Sudan is a place that the western world cannot exploit. With the exception of a few million barrels of oil (which the Arabs control), there are no other natural resources for the Americans or Europeans to exploit (i.e., diamonds, gold, mineral, or agricultural products).

Where is the outrage from my fellow African-American counterparts who themselves are just 140 years removed from the physical and psychological hell of slavery? You would think that blacks in America would be protesting in front of the White House, the State Department, or the Capitol building, but no. We're too busy buying rims for our SUV's (sorry, but I HAD to go there). We are supposed to be a Christian nation, yet many of us don't lift a finger to help our dark-skinned Christian brothers in Africa where slavery and genocide are alive and well. I don't understand how some of us can sleep at night while our brothers and sisters are enduring this hellish nightmare.

James Yates is a freelance writer from Virginia currently living in North Carolina. He is the author of "Insights of a Native Son; a collection of Prose, Essays, and Poems." Contact him at yfrank87@hotmail.com.