

Kwanza -- An Alternative Celebration

Kwanza was first articulated by Ron Karenga in the mid-sixties. Those who remember those turbulent years, either as active participants or sympathetic observers will agree it was a time of social upheaval not ever before seen in this country. The Civil Rights Movement was picking up momentum, young blacks were in the streets, and a foreign war was growing more unpopular by the day.

In the midst of these changes, many blacks searched for their true identity, looking to break away from being the overlooked shadows of a predominantly Europeanized non-black culture. Karenga and other blacks saw the need to fill the cultural vacuum that had enclosed black people and their past. The afro was in vogue, so were African prints, sculpture, jewelry and dashikis. However, these were all materialistic manifestations of blackness which seldom touched the spirit and soul of black people.

Black playwrights and writers such as Imamu Baraka (Leroi Jones) and Haki Hammabuti (Don Lee) sought to crystallize the black experience, to make it real enough to internalize the pride, beauty and strength of black people — and above all, begin to form the value base necessary to sustain their traditional culture.

Kwanza (pronounced Quan-za), meaning first fruits was born out of this need for Afro-Americans to have and share with others a cultural celebration of their own which reflects their proud and highly spiritual African heritage. Kwanza merges the traditional after harvest agrarian celebration, native to most African peoples, with the black economic and political consciousness which evolved out of the sixties.

As a value, or cultural base, the seven days of Kwanza emphasize and reflect the seven African principles of Liberation: Umoja—Unity, Kujichagulia—Self determination, Ujima—Collective work and responsibility, Ujamaa—Cooperative economics, Nia—Purpose, Kuumba—Creativity, and Imani—Faith. These seven principles (Nguzo saba) provide a set of values which serve to clarify and unify the cultural, economic, and political objectives of black people.

Lou Palmer, the noted black journalist, has provided us with an inspirational view of the seven principles celebrated during Kwanza including the 'hows' and 'whys' to plan your own. Some may prefer to mix Kwanza and Christmas. Others may simply decide to stick to Santa Claus and his reindeer. Those who celebrate the spirit and meaning of Kwanza and the Nguzo saba will find a new joy and sense of pride in sharing a true part of themselves with the greater part of black people worldwide.

Umoja—African principle of unity — unity in mind, unity in body, unity in spirit and unity in the collective embrace of all concepts, ideals and actions which make us the black and African people that we are.

Umoja, spoken to each other on December 26, the first day of Kwanza, in commemoration and respect for the kind of all-African unification which made our ancestors' land — the place of many diverse tribal units and tribal customs — a continent of great empires and centers of knowledge, all created by the collective will and spirit that we now refer to proudly as the African or black experience.

To be sure, Kwanza and the concept of the seven principles are more familiar to Africans who reside in Swahili speaking countries in the more easterly parts of Africa and all other parts of the black world straining against the age-old yokes of colonialism and other acts of human exploitation. The principles of Kwanza are being stressed as a unifying factor for us all.

Umoja, the first principle, because without it all other principles are less meaningful. Unity demands that we strive for and maintain together an understanding, patience and solidarity in our families, in our communities and among ourselves as a group of people. Unity demands that we accept ourselves

as a group of people. Unity demands that we accept ourselves as we really are. A people of noble heritage from a continent of great resources, opting to be no mirror reflecting of anyone else's culture, when that of our own is of such significance. Demanding nothing more and certainly nothing less than what is ours by right of heritage and the contribution we have made to the whole world in this light. To unite, as a force of people who are working for a common cause, finding diversity and creativity collectively.

Umoja signifies what unity means as an organizing and liberating tool, in that, as we begin to set our minds in a frame of reference we will become aware of, and loyal to, one single purpose for blacks all over the world. That single purpose or single ideology is unconditional

freedom. It also means that the entire black family — every man, woman and — is dutifully committed, each passing day, to this cause and crusade.

Kujichagulia — African principle of self determination. Spoken on December 27th the second day of Kwanza. Translated from Kiswahili, it means self-determination in that we define ourselves and speak for ourselves instead of being defined and spoken for by others. This concept represents that side of us which makes and molds us into the kind of persons who can build great nations and live in crime free communities.

If we think of ourselves as a no good, troublesome, lazy, uninspired and uncreative people, then we act in these same ways — always dependent on other people and

other cultures for our well-being. Self determination is a process where one determines the destinies of those who follow in one's footsteps. One must be proud, certain and defensive of his/her own values, works, and esteem as a human being. Kujichagulia demands that one be self assured enough to start a particular course and live up to it with integrity. It represents the principle of human nobility, the fact that any man can reach the top of his or her hopes and aspirations so long as he or she makes it clear to the world that he/she is determined to get there under his or her own steam and own control.

Ujima — The African principle of collective work and responsibility. Spoken on December 28th, the third day of Kwanza. Ujima permits us to move toward higher levels


of working toward common goals. Collective work means that we examine projects that are geared toward the improvement, uplifting, enrichment and development of power for black people. It also means that we become involved and lend our individual energy and creativity to these programs in our community.

Working together toward common goals requires large measures of devotion and dedication to a project. It requires high levels of trust so that no black brother or sister need every worry about the knife of betrayal being slipped into him or her by another brother or sister. Ujima means that we build, and maintain, our communities together and that we make our brothers' and sisters' problems our problems. Solving them together, no

matter what they are or how small or insignificant they may seem to be. Ujima means that we do not yell for help only when our house is burning. It means attaining a responsible attitude that will allow us to pick up the bucket and put out the fire raging in any black persons life. Umoja will produce the climate where all of us receive the necessary self assurance to cope with our own place in the world and help determine where our people will go from a collective point of view.

[Continued Next Week]

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