

FORUM

When too much stuff is not enough



Nigel Alston

Motivational Moments

"Always buy a good bed and a good pair of shoes. If you're not in one, you're in the other."
— Gloria Hunniford

I have too much stuff. My CD collection is a good example.

There are stacks of them everywhere. They're on the counter in the den. And in my car. A fellow has to have his music.

The real truth is this: I have more CDs than I have time to hear. Yet still, I make almost weekly trips to the store for more.

Then there are my books. I wander up and down the aisles of bookstores when there are books on my bookshelf — largely unread — collecting dust. I do manage to rearrange them from time to time.

Even worse are the piles of books that sit beside my piles of

CDs.

Both drive my wife crazy. "Too much clutter," she says. "But I can't help it, I argue. My eyes see more and, of course, I want more."

Accumulating things is a year-round activity for me, yet I still manage to enter the holidays empty-handed. Some people shop year-round for Christmas gifts. That's not me. The day after Thanksgiving is too early for me.

Despite the fact that I'm in the store more often than I care to admit, I don't think to buy Christmas gifts to add to my collection of stacks.

Yep, the more we have, the more we want. Here I am wondering if I need to go to the store more often when already I'm there too much. Whatever happened to being thankful for what you already have? According to the National Retail Federation, sales for the 30-day holiday shopping season are expected to hit \$184 billion, up 6 percent from last year.

I understand at least one reason why — full-page newspaper ads. During the holiday they're everywhere

and looked good. Full color ads tout everything from full-length fur coats to waffle irons all at savings that are "out of this world."

Seeing them is like asking your mother for more food when you haven't finished eating what's already on your plate. Your eyes were bigger than your stomach. You want more, but you really don't need it.

"I have a lovely home," said a thankful person, working hard to practice sincere gratitude. "But still, I see homes in magazines and visit homes of friends and I think my house could be better or bigger. I think about buying new furniture and there's nothing wrong with what I already have."

We can't seem to satisfy that insatiable appetite for more.

I've fallen in that trap too. I remember cashing my paycheck one Friday afternoon and walking downtown during lunch hour. I ventured into a jewelry store after looking in the window. That was a mistake. Moments later, I had purchased a new watch. What's so unusual about this? I had a perfectly good watch on my arm — it worked

and looked good.

Some people I know are challenging themselves to learn when "enough is enough." Just how many pairs of shoes do you need?

At least one person has changed her battle cry for 2000. Now she believes more means less. Boxing up household items for a recent move produced a major revelation, she said.

"I can't get over how much stuff we have," she told me. "I mean how many sets of china do we need when our lifestyles mean that we seldom eat at home and even if we did dine at home more often, there's only two of us?"

Here is a bit of advice I read recently.

"It's OK to want the good things in life. But wisdom, balance and gratitude help us to appreciate what we already have and overcome the addiction of MORE."

That's something to think about. Nigel Alston is an executive with Integon Insurance and can be reached at P.O. Box 722, Winston-Salem, N.C. 27102 or e-mailed at nalston237@aol.com

Forging a new millennium through Kwanzaa

Dr. Maulana Karenga

Guest Columnist

At the heart of our celebration of Kwanzaa is the practice of pausing and turning inward as persons and a people are thinking deeply about the wonder and obligation of being African in the world.

In a word, we are to measure ourselves in the mirror of the best of our history and culture and to ask ourselves where we stand in relationship to these highest of human standards. Although this dialog with our culture is emphasized during Kwanzaa, especially on the Day of Meditation, Jan. 1, the last day of Kwanzaa, we know well that we are also obligated to engage in this essential self-questioning throughout the year and indeed throughout our lives.

But clearly, this ongoing conversation with our culture takes on a special meaning this Kwanzaa. This transitional period marks the end of one era and the beginning of another. And we say era rather than millennium, for on the oldest calendar in the world, the ancient African calendar of Egypt, the new year will not be 2000 as on the Gregorian calendar, but rather the year 6240.

Still we are at the juncture of a new era, not because of a date on a calendar, but because of the massive transformations that have occurred in the world and our rightful concern with the effect these changes will have on our lives, on the lives of peoples around the world and on the world itself.

Among the changes that define this era are the new technologies, especially those in information systems, biomedicine and genetic modification and manipulation in humans, plants and animals.

In such a context, we must ask what does this actually mean for us and the world and should we consider every scientific pursuit worthy and every technological development progress? What do these activities, especially genetic manipulation, mean for our concept of human uniqueness, human agency and human dignity, and

what is the difference between more access to data which our computers give us and real knowledge, critical thinking and grasping the essentials for a good life? Equally important, what kind of world will we leave for future generations and how can we struggle to ensure that all real advances are a shared good?

Also, this era is clearly defined by the increasing privatization of public and natural space, the suppression of liberation movements by major powers in the world and their client states and domestic dictators and the widespread exhaustion of old liberals, progressives and even many radicals. We must ask what does this mean for human freedom and human flourishing and again how do we intervene to ensure both.

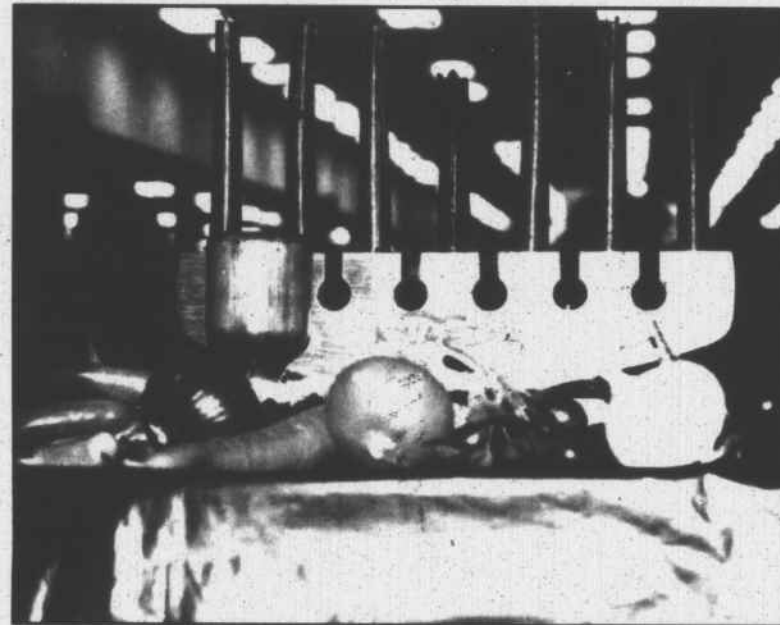
Our foremother, Mary McLeod Bethune, taught us to respect the fact that we are heirs and custodians of a great legacy and thus we are obligated to bear the burden and glory of this legacy with strength, dignity and determination.

No part of our legacy is more valuable than the unique ethical teaching of the Odu Ifa, the sacred text of our Yoruba ancestors, that we and all humans are divinely chosen to bring good into the world and that this is the fundamental meaning and mission of human life.

As we move into the next decade and new era, no lesson is more important for us to learn from our history and culture than our need to recognize our interrelatedness as a people and part of humanity and our parallel need to establish and practice an ethics of sharing which recognizes and builds on this interrelatedness in the most positive and mutually beneficial ways. In fact, this is an indispensable way to fulfill and further our moral obligation to constantly bring good into the world.

The concept of sharing in African culture is central to our self-understanding and self-assertion in the world. The spirit of sharing permeates the principles and practice of Kwanzaa.

Each of the Nguzo Saba (The Seven Principles), which are the core principles of Kwanzaa, contain within them the concept and



The kinara, a symbol of Kwanzaa.

practice of sharing. Umoja (unity) is a shared sense of relatedness in history, culture, identity and destiny. Kujichagulia (self-determination) supports our shared right and responsibility to determine and live our shared life as persons and a people.

Ujima (collective work and responsibility) speaks to our shared efforts and obligation to conceive and build the world we want and deserve to live in. Ujamaa (cooperative economics) is a principle of shared work and shared wealth based on kinship with each other and the world, and on our right to share equitably and responsibly in the natural and created good of the world. Nia (purpose) is rooted in our shared meaning and mission of human life to create and increase good in the world and not let any good be lost.

The principle of Kuumba (creativity) speaks to our shared obligation to do all we can constantly to heal and repair the world, making it more beautiful and beneficial than when we inherited it. And finally the principle of Imani (faith) requires a shared belief and confidence in the good and a steadfast commitment to increase good in the world, preserve it and pass it on to future generations.

Our tradition teaches us that the best good is a shared good. Freedom, justice, love, sisterhood,

brotherhood, friendship, family, community, culture and indeed life itself are all shared goods. We speak here then of the creation and increase of the common good. Indeed, the Odu Ifa says that essential good comes from a gathering together in harmony. But to cultivate and maintain this harmonious gathering together to create and increase good in the world, an ethics of sharing is indispensable. And this sharing must be in at least seven areas: (1) shared status; (2) shared knowledge; (3) shared space; (4) shared wealth; (5) shared power; (6) shared interests; and (7) shared responsibility.

The principle of shared status is the foundational principle of the ethics of sharing and reaffirms the equal dignity and inherent worthiness of every person and people, an ancient principle found in The Husia, the sacred text of ancient Egypt, which first taught the divine status and dignity of the human person.

The principle of shared knowledge speaks to the indispensable need for knowledge for human development and human flourishing and, therefore, recognizes education as a fundamental human right.

The principle of shared space requires sharing our neighborhoods, the country and the envi-

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