

MELODYE MICERE STEWART

In the
spirit of
Ma'at



Seven principles for liberation

Kwanzaa teaches culture, self-reliance

Kwanzaa, the African American cultural holiday, will be celebrated by an estimated 18 million African people who live in the United States, the Caribbean and on the continent of Africa.

The Nguzo Saba, or "The Seven Principles of Blackness," are Unity, Self-Determination, Collective Work and Responsibility, Cooperative Economics, Purpose, Creativity and Faith. During the month of December, "In the Spirit of Ma'at" will focus upon various aspects of this important opportunity to raise group consciousness.

In order to understand the importance of this non-religious, cultural holiday and the values Kwanzaa promotes, we must consider its potential. Kujichagulia, Self-Determination may be the most powerful principle of the seven. "To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves, instead of being defined, named created for and spoken for by others," is the Kwanzaa principle that epitomizes the goal of the African American's history of struggle and pursuit of equality. Self-determination is the motivational force of self-empowerment, both individually and collectively. Self-determination is the energy which fuels self-actualization - the ability to reach for and obtain goals. This is where Umoja - unity - and Kujichagulia - Self-Determination - go hand-in-hand.

In his last book, "Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?" Martin Luther King expressed the need for group unity

in order to achieve the common goal of group liberation, writing, "We have been oppressed as a group and we must overcome that oppression as a group." Even in 1968, King noted that too many black organizations, "the black church, the black press, the black fraternities and sororities, and black professional associations... have never given their full resources to the cause of black liberation." Have African Americans become a people without group unity and self-determination?

If so, the words of King are, again, instructive. He wrote, "There must be a climate of social pressure in the African American community that scorns the African American who will not pick up his citizenship rights and add his strength enthusiastically and voluntarily to the accumulation of power for himself and his people." In order words, it is incumbent upon each of us to practice Umoja - Unity and Kujichagulia - Self-Determination, purposefully reconnecting to each other and then dedicating a portion of our time, talent and resources to the liberation of our people.

Reaction strong both ways

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deadly force if an officer perceives a threat to an officer's life.

"I'm not satisfied and I never have been. Peter has a history of doing exactly what he did (Monday)," said Bob Davis, president of the Black Political Caucus. "And it's partly our fault, allowing him to stay in office 22 years."

Charlotte City Council member Malachi Greene said Gilchrist followed the law, although it's not popular.

"It's what I expected," he said. "Based on an understanding of the things (City Council) knew from what the investigation turned up, I didn't expect anything different."

"They came to a correct decision. Whether or not it's the right decision, I can't make that judgment. I think that's for the good Lord to make."

Mayor Pat McCrory sent faxes to 100 church and community leaders to seek their input on dealing with the divide between African Americans and whites.

"My first reaction is the need to communicate now to the community the DA's decision and also communicate the next steps this community must take," he said.

"My message is to continue to work through these challenges in a peaceful way like we did in the (Officers John) Burnette (Andy) Nobles shooting; like we did with the church burnings and like we will do with this tragedy. That's my goal - to prevent violence in this city and this nation, and we all have to work together to do that, as community leaders, as church leaders, as police officers and political leaders."

In light of recent violent episodes in St. Petersburg, Fla. and Pittsburgh, Pa. after police were accused of overstepping the bounds of deadly force against African Americans, Charlotte police braced for the possibility. Sixty officers trained to deter violent confrontations were put on alert this week in case they were needed. Although Charlotte isn't known for unrest, the Marlow decision won't help an uneasy peace.

"As a lawyer, I've always committed to peaceful processes," said attorney James Ferguson, who represents Cooper's family. "The community responds to circumstances like this based upon their perceived justice of the

Decision unpopular

Continued from page 1A

istrative duty pending the outcome of separate investigations by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Charlotte Police, said Cooper reached into his car, prompting him to open fire. Shaquetta, who was found in the backseat after the shooting, was not hurt.

Gilchrist's decision came down to legal precedent. Under N.C. law, the shooting was justified because Marlow had reason to believe his life was in danger although Cooper was unarmed. In essence, Gilchrist said, successfully prosecuting Marlow would've been difficult if not impossible.

"The state must prove the defendant didn't act in self-defense under the circumstances," Gilchrist said.

That didn't set well with Dianne Cooper, who said her brother didn't pose a threat other than being black.

"We know from the autopsy report that the officer's story cannot be true. James Willie was shot in the side, so he could not have been facing the officer as the officer said," she said. "It seems that no matter what the facts show, the district attorney is unwilling to prosecute a police officer who shoots an unarmed citizen."

"To us, it cannot be a coincidence that persons who die at the hands of the police are almost always African Americans killed by white police officers."

Cooper's family "is very frus-

trated" by Gilchrist's decision, said Charlotte attorney James Ferguson, who is representing them. Not prosecuting Marlow, he says, cheats society of a fair hearing of facts.

"What we saw...was the district attorney setting out the reasons why this matter should have gone to a jury and then concluding that it should not," Ferguson said. "It should be left to a jury to decide issues like this and not just to a member of the community who works with the police all of the time."

Relations between police and African Americans in Charlotte have been strained at best over the last three years. With the shooting death of another motorist, Windy Gail Thompson, in 1993, blacks are concerned that law enforcement officers have less respect for African American life. Coupled with complaints that police were too slow in snaring admitted serial killer Henry Louis Wallace, who is on trial for murdering 10 black women in Charlotte, tensions are rising.

"We seem to be dealing with a double standard where the police are not held to the same standards as others in the same circumstance," Ferguson said.

"What we essentially heard today was the defense of the police officer that should have been properly presented by the police officer in court and the prosecution should have presented this matter to a jury so we could have a fair, just and objective determination of the issues that arose in this tragic killing."

case. From what I've heard, the decision...will not satisfy the African American community."

Law enforcement's stock among African Americans has dipped since several high-profile incidents involving white officers and black suspects. From the shooting of Officer Terry Lyles by Calvin Cunningham to Marlow shooting Cooper, a hedge of mistrust has separated the two sides. Charging Marlow would have given the legal system an opportunity to hear evidence.

"We've got to do some damage control," Davis said. "I would have preferred he indict the officer and let him be tried by a jury of his peers and then if the facts pointed out that he's not guilty, then so be it. But at least it would bring some credibility back to the judicial system, and right now, there isn't much out there."

The concerns of black people about racism can't be underestimated, Ferguson said. In order to restore faith in police, more needs to be done to weed out and prosecute officers who disregard black life and rights.

"We cannot be viewed in isolation. You look at what happens with police killings," Ferguson said. "What you see is a clear picture of black citizens, often unarmed, who are killed by white police officers followed by a purported investigation which never results in any action being taken in regard to the officer. How often can you tell a community that race has no part to play when all that community sees is a black person being killed by a white officer?"

Community activist Ahmad Daniels said Marlow's exoneration sends a negative message to black youth, who he says will be more likely to view police with suspicion. "My reaction is not one of surprise," he said. "My reaction is that many of the youth in the community will realize that you do not have a friend in the police department, that you really have to take a course to survive being a black male in America, particularly in Charlotte."

"This has come and this has gone for the most part," Daniels said. "The most we can do now is provide classes for African American youth - male and female - and make them more aware of what to do when a police officer pulls you over, black or white. It's not solely

about race. It's a mind set that individuals have when they have a gun. It's aggravated by race."

"I don't think there's going to be too much street demonstration," Davis said. "The glimmer of hope is that the Human Relations Committee will really do what it's set up to do, and that is organize on a consistent basis, community dialogue."

Despite calls for an independent review board, McCrory insists there are enough boards to keep police in line.

"We're reviewing the whole process," he said. "The goal is to prevent future incidences from occurring. I'm more apt to concentrate on solutions that will prevent future violence in our community and future tragedies like this from occurring."

"I've always stated that we do have a review board right now. The city council has reviewed previous cases in addition to our community relations department. Maybe the question should be 'Is there a need another review board or another investigation.' At this point, I haven't seen the rationale for five investigations versus four."

Greene said he doesn't believe Marlow shot Cooper solely because of the color of his skin, but race may have played a part.

"Peter Gilchrist has to play the game by the rules he has been given as the laws of the state of North Carolina," Greene said. "Those laws have been drawn over the years a certain way. As a district attorney, that's his job, to interpret those laws and see if they apply to this specific case."

"Did Officer Marlow intend to shoot a black person? No. Did the cultural divide that exists in the community precipitate the kind of fear that would lead Officer Marlow to do that? I suspect so."

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