

MELODY MICERE STEWART

In the  
spirit of  
Ma'at



## It's more than just a holiday

Kwanzaa teaches principles we can all benefit from

**K**wanzaa. It's not just another holiday. The principles of Kwanzaa - Unity, Self Determination, Collective Work and Responsibility, Cooperative Economics, Purpose, Creativity and Faith - represent the foundation upon which this unique, African American holiday was created. The vision and insight of Dr. Maulana Karenga gave birth to Kwanzaa in 1966; today, an estimated 18 million people of African descent will observe the Kwanzaa season. Beyond the public and private celebrations of Kwanzaa, African Americans need to quietly and seriously reflect upon the Nguzo Saba - The Seven Principles of Blackness - and commit to practicing them on a daily basis. The principles were designed to elicit our conscious actions as a race of people toward self empowerment.

How can we learn and incorporate the Nguzo Saba into our collective lives? Ask yourself (and your family):

1. What can I do to build bridges of Umoja/Unity in this community?
2. How can I challenge myself towards Kujichagulia/Self-Determination? Do I need to acquire new skills, read more and/or set new career goals?
3. Am I practicing Ujima/Collective Work and Responsibility in my family and community life? Am I able to make a larger contribution in this area?

4. Am I thinking about the politics of Ujamaa/Cooperative Economics with this purchase? How can I be a more critical consumer of goods and services?

5. How can I tap into the Kuumba/Creativity of my history and culture to empower myself, my family and my community?

6. Have I identified my higher Nia/Purpose in life? Considering the state of black America, clearly we all have a purpose toward improving our collective lot.

7. Am I living by Imani/Faith? Faith is the bedrock of risk-taking; faith-inspired risk-taking may very well lead our people into a more prosperous future.

Kwanzaa. It's not just another holiday. According to Dr. Karenga, "Kwanzaa is a time for (African American) people to come together to reaffirm bonds, to be rooted in our culture and return to our history." We must read and learn our history and then teach it our children. Over the holiday, purchase Lerone Bennett's "Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America." Every black home should have one. Why? African American history is filled with important examples of critical thinking skills, problem-solving deeds and ancestral lessons. Our historical thread of struggle is also woven with extraordinary acts of bravery, vision and courage.

Celebrate Kwanzaa in 1996. Practice the Nguzo Saba in 1997. As descendants of the people who started civilization, it is truly time for us to rise again.

# Black English controversial school subject

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ing it's different and not that it has to be abandoned but that something has to be learned," said Peter Haberfeld of the Oakland teachers' union, which supports the change. "It's building on kids' strengths."

The Oakland School Board voted last week to officially recognize Black English, also known as Ebonics - a term combining "ebony" and "phonics."

How the new policy will be implemented hasn't been worked out, but possibilities include placing Black English-speaking students in classes that will help them learn standard English. It also creates a program to train teachers to understand Black English.

The American Speech, Language and Hearing Association has classified Black

English as a social dialect with its own lexicon and syntax.

For instance, if a student says "He done did it" for "He has done it," teachers would translate the phrase to standard English, rather than just correcting the student.

English words in Black English lose a "d" following a vowel, so "good" becomes "goo," and the final "th" is sometimes replaced with "f," so "with" becomes "wif." Speakers also can use double or even triple negatives, such as "I'm not going back there no more."

School board members insist their motivation is improving the performance of black students, who make up 53 percent of the 52,000-student district and 71 percent of those enrolled in special education courses.

The decision has provoked strong reactions from black

leaders and others across the country. Poet Maya Angelou called the decision a mistake.

"I'm incensed," Angelou told The Wichita Eagle. "The very idea that African American language is a language separate and apart is very threatening, because it can encourage young men and women not to learn standard English."

In a statement issued in Chicago, the Rev. Jesse Jackson said, "While we are fighting in California trying to extend affirmative action and fighting to teach our children so they become more qualified for jobs, in Oakland some madness has erupted over making slang talk a second language."

"You don't have to go to school to learn to talk garbage..."

Oakland officials seemed surprised by the uproar. Board member Toni Cook said admin-

istrators released a statement Saturday, explaining the intent of the policy.

"The Oakland Unified School district is not replacing the teaching of standard American English with any other language. We are not teaching Ebonics," the statement said. "What we are doing in Oakland is providing our teachers and parents with the tools to address the diverse languages our children bring into the classroom."

Some have questioned a paragraph in the resolution referring to "African Language Systems" as being "genetically based and not a dialect of English." Cook said the board used "genetically" to refer to historic and cultural, not biological, factors.

Black English already has

been taught in a number of schools, including Ann Arbor, Mich., where a suit by parents resulted in a court ordering teachers to help Black English-speakers learn standard English without making them give up their mother tongue.

Oakland appears to be the first district to make a system-wide change.

Gary Marx, a spokesman for the National Association of School Administrators, expected debate over the issue to spread.

"School systems across the country will be very interested in seeing how this program plays out - the techniques that are used and what works, what doesn't work, what could be done better," he said.

## Studies focus on black history

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Though Stewart has been doing the program, "Black History Workshop for Children" in Philadelphia for 10 years, this is her first program in the Charlotte school system. Over 500 young people have taken the workshop since it began, in her home, at community centers and at Temple University campus, Stewart said.

Moore said the new study program is an attempt to deal with recurring problems of underachievement and discipline among the African American students who attend Bruns, a year-round magnet school that immerses students in German.

Most of the African American students come from the inner city neighborhoods surrounding the school off Tuckaseegee Road.

"We set up the concept as a pilot program to determine the effect on students in terms of behavior and performance," Moore said. "We are trying to make changes in the black-white gap in performance. My concern is to determine why we have a gap."

"We looked at a number of reasons. We looked at expectations...how students were not

expected to perform. They don't understand the history enough to understand that we do and

we have performed. History has tricked us. We look at the slave mentality instead of looking at where our roots are."

Coupled with the student seminar is training for

parents, including workshops on what is expected of students and what's expected of them as parents. Parents are expected to be partners in the program.

"We have a unique opportunity at Bruns," Moore said. "It is a year round/German immersion school. We have had a German immersion parent group. Now we have an African American parent group, all under the PTA umbrella."

"The PTA is interested in all students getting exposure to the African American history. If we get enough money, we will open the program to all students. Stereotyping comes from lack of knowledge. We have to do some-

thing differently."

The Bruns program was started as part of the school's club system, which allowed all students to participate in various interest groups. Students taking the afrocentric seminar are in the minority achievement group, a longstanding club at the school.

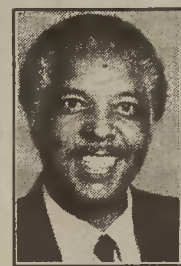
Moore said Stewart's workshops are based on the Kwanzaa principles.

"We are trying to get students aware of the fact we do have values, longstanding beliefs," Moore said. "They look at African American history from 10,000 BC...the contributions we made to society, from agriculture, to the pyramids, inventions, astronomy."

"Most of the time black history is taught from the periphery," Moore said. "We are trying to show how significant we are on this planet...where we are and where we are going."

While parents have been highly favorable about the program, it's too early for a full evaluation of the impact it may have. Moore said he's determined to do something to help African American students.

"I'm going to tear it down or fix it up," he said.



Moore

## Welfare benefits should stay: Activists

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McCrory said.

ACORN's contention is that while Charlotte has low unemployment overall - 3.3 percent - it is two to four times higher in lower-income, predominantly black neighborhoods near uptown. Using figures from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Neighborhood Assessment, the First Ward community, for example, has an unemployment rate of 23 percent.

Without an extension of funds, families will be forced to fend for themselves, Phifer said. Unable to locate jobs that can provide self-sufficiency, more people will go hungry and homeless.

"Without a waiver, the state will be punishing people for not having a job when there aren't any jobs for them," she said.

Even mayors can't agree on the new rules' impact,

McCrory said.

"I anticipate positive results in terms of people not being dependent of the govern-



McCrory

ment," he said. "But there's a general consensus among mayors that the prognosis all theory. Some think it will help people become less dependent. Others don't."

Phifer said the state doesn't have to invest much to keep a safety net under Charlotte's poorest citizens.

"We are not talking about huge sums of money for each person - just about \$20 a week - but those \$20 are many people's only steady source of income," she said. "Taking it away from 1,000

people in our city means a loss of \$20,000 federal dollars spent on food for some of the lowest income people.

"Without a waiver, the state will be choosing more hunger and more homelessness."

## Air Force harassment

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though it raises questions about whether he could continue to serve behind next April, when a command change is scheduled.

"Although personally likable, I believe he cannot recover enough to resolve these issues," Eckert's report said.

A Nov. 18 report from the Air Force Social Actions branch at Charleston Air Force Base said that "strong indicators of sexual harassment are present."

That report was based on surveys and interviews of all Air Force members assigned to the brig.

"One Air Force female stated she was sexually harassed by a

high-ranking Navy enlisted member in the presence of the Air Force senior enlisted (member)," the report said.

When confronted, the officer involved "retaliated by creating an intimidating environment."

The Air Force report also said there were indications that Navy guards used racial slurs against some of the prisoners, and that the prisoners refused to eat some of their meals as a result.

Cmdr. Mike Brady, a Navy spokesman in Washington, confirmed that an investigation of the "command climate" in Charleston was ongoing. He refused to reveal further details.

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