



BURT WOLF TASTE OF FREEDOM KWANZAA



Kwanzaa is a Swahili word that means “first fruits of the harvest.” It is a holiday that runs from December 26th to January 1st and gives African-Americans an opportunity to celebrate their African roots. It is not a religious holiday and it makes no attempt to replace Christmas or any of the other celebrations that take place at this time of the year.

Kwanzaa was created in 1966 by Dr. Maulana (Ron) Karenga, a leading proponent of the Black Cultural Movement and currently chairman of black studies at California State University in Long Beach. He chose a Swahili word for the festival because Swahili is a language used in many parts of East Africa and illustrates the point that black Americans come from many parts of Africa. In fact, there is no festival in Africa that is called Kwanzaa. Karenga took elements from different African cultures in order to create a festival that is unique in its ability to represent various African societies. Today, over 13 million people celebrate Kwanzaa and it is rapidly being accepted by black African communities throughout the world.

HARLEM: EPICENTER OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN CULTURE

The first European settlers to arrive on the island of Manhattan were Dutch and they showed up in 1625. They called their community Harlem which was the name of the town they had come from in the Netherlands. Today, Harlem is the epicenter of African-American culture in the United States.

During the 1830s, the New York and Harlem Railroad built a rail line connecting Harlem to downtown New York and the area became a hot property. Many of New York's most important families decided to build their estates on these streets. When a second railroad line was put up from downtown to Harlem, the area was overrun with real estate developers. They thought they could build hundreds of elegant and expensive homes and wealthy New Yorkers would buy in, but they ended up



with more expensive homes than New York had wealthy families. The developers didn't do the math and they were in deep trouble.

A group of black and white real estate brokers, approached the white developers in their

empty buildings, explained that they were aware of the developer's reluctance to sell to blacks but also pointed out that money was green and the only way the developers were going to get any was from them.

Between 1900 and 1920, Harlem became a predominantly black community, but it also became the geographic center for black literature, theater, painting, photography and music.



JOYCE GOLD
Manhattan Historian:

There were a number of reasons why Harlem became the center of Black culture. One was the literary output. Many writers and artists started moving into Harlem, particularly in the 1920s. Gene Tumor and W.E.B. Du Bois, wrote works of literature that appealed and helped define African-Americans to themselves, and there was



something of a literary awakening that spread beyond the confines of Harlem. It helped attract African-Americans from many parts of the country to that hotbed of cultural ferment. In the early 1920s, Noble Sissle wrote a play called "Shuffle Along". It

was the first African-American play to appear on Broadway. It was very well received; it was very lively, and people wanted to hear more. A'Lelia Walker was the daughter of Madame C.J. Walker, the wealthiest, self-made woman in America. Her mother had left her a third of her fortune, and A'Lelia Walker opened up something of a salon in Harlem, something called The Black Tower. Some of the white downtown money appeared, heard what the Black cultural center was achieving, and helped fund it. So, that attracted more black artists to Harlem.

SYMBOLS OF KWANZAA

The African-American community had art, culture, music but it did not have its own holiday until Kwanzaa. The mystical number seven guides the Kwanzaa celebration; there are seven days to the festival, seven principals to follow and seven symbolic objects.

JESSICA HARRIS

Author, *A Kwanzaa Keepsake*:

Anyone who is going to celebrate Kwanzaa will have the seven symbols organized either on a Kwanzaa table or as a centerpiece to the house. The symbols are built on the mkeka or the mat. The mat, representing the building block of the holiday, the foundation of the holiday.



The mat also symbolizes the foundation of Africa and the foundation on which African-American values are based. A basket of fruit and vegetables go on to the Kwanzaa table symbolizing the harvest that takes place when people work together; ears of corn represent children; a communal cup is laid out to show the unity of all the people of African descent. A seven-branched candleholder called a kinara stands for Africa. The candles stand for the seven principles that Karenga made part of Kwanzaa.

A kinara has seven candle holders, and we organize it in such a way that the middle candle holder is the black candle. The candles

on the kinara are red, black and green, which are the colors of African unity. The black one, for the people. The red one, to represent struggle, and the green one to represent attainment. On the first night of Kwanzaa, we light the candle of umoja, the Candle of Unity, which is the black candle in the middle. On the second day of Kwanzaa we light the red candle, on the third day of Kwanzaa the green candle, and so on and so forth until we end with the final green candle of Imani. Why do we alternate between red and green? To represent the fact that without struggle, there is no attainment.

PRINCIPLES OF KWANZAA

On each day of Kwanzaa, a candle is lit and one of the seven principles is discussed. Umoja which is unity; Kujichagulia which is self-determination; Ujima, collective work and responsibility; Ujamaa, cooperative economics; Nia, purpose; Kuumba, creativity; and Imani, faith.



THE SEVEN SYMBOLIC OBJECTS OF KWANZAA

1. MAZAO: The fruits and vegetables which represent the product of a united effort by the community—the rewards of collective labor.
2. MKEKA: The straw place mat on which the fruits and vegetables are placed. It represents respect for tradition.
3. MUHINDI: An ear of corn for each child in the family.
4. ZAWADI: Simple gifts, preferably illustrating an African influence and related to education.
5. KIKOMBE CHA UMOJA: A communal cup used for pouring a liquid as part of a symbolic act of sacrifice.
6. KINARA: A seven branched candleholder symbolizing the continent and peoples of Africa.
7. MISHUMAA SABA: The seven candles, each one symbolizing one of the seven principles that black Americans should live by.

UJAMAA - COOPERATIVE ECONOMICS

A perfect example of the fourth night, cooperative economics, is Londel's restaurant. In 1995, Londel Davis, a retired police officer, opened Londel's Supper Club on the same spot where he used to pack groceries as a child.

LONDEL DAVIS

Londel's Supper Club, New York:

I put Londel's Restaurant in the center Harlem community. I've hired people from the community. I let it be known to them that this is a new beginning, so this is a way that you can sort of get back on track, better your condition.

Londel's cuisine encompasses three different styles of cooking; Southern traditional, Cajun, and Continental. I sat down with Kenny the chef and talked about the type of menu we wanted, and we agreed that Harlem needed something for the future. We realized that the complexion is changing, there are new people coming to the community, and ideally as people live here they will spend their money here. So the menu encompasses these three types of cooking. This restaurant has become quite popular for its blackened catfish, sauteed spinach, and seasoned rice pilaf.

Londel's is a supper club and that dictates that we have music. I have a wonderful woman tonight, Laura Mann. Me and Laura go back to the early days of the restaurant. She's a wonderful woman. This is back in the days when the restaurant was doing very poorly, and we couldn't pay much money. The scale might have been a hundred dollars a night. She would come and she'd say, "Well, you know, God's going to bless you, don't worry about it. I just like the spirit of the restaurant."

I often say that, my mother and the spirit are the reason I'm here and I'm doing what I'm doing. She instilled in me the love of God and the love of people. That's the kind of person she was. Her picture's on the wall because I feel that she's watching over me.

KUUMBA - CREATIVITY

When it comes to the principle of creativity you've got to take a look at the Apollo Theater. The Apollo opened in 1914 as

a burlesque house. Though blacks performed, it was a white-only audience. By 1934 under pressure from Mayor La Guardia, the theater went from burlesque entertainment to variety revues and opened its doors to African-Americans.

BILLY MITCHELL

Apollo Theater, New York:

I used to be an errand boy for the stars. I would stand at the backstage door, and as these stars would come in, I would offer to run errands for them. In the latter part of 1934, there was a Jewish brother. His name was Frank Schiffman. He ran this place from 1934 until 1977 starting the careers of all the people whose pictures are up on the wall people like Billie Holiday, Lena Horne, Dionne Warwick, Aretha Franklin, Gladys Knight, and James Brown. They all appeared in a show called Amateur Night at the Apollo, which is our longest running show.



The Apollo Theater auditorium is where we do our Amateur Night. If they like what you're doing, they'll applaud you. However, if they think that your act is, as they say, wack, they will boo you.

In 1937, Ella Fitzgerald was a contestant in our Amateur Night show. Ella was scheduled to perform as a dancer. Ella was studying



dance for awhile and she was intimidated by the dancers that preceded her on the show that night. So she turned to the host Ralph Cooper, and said, "Mr. Cooper, sir, I don't think I can go out there, those people are so good and I don't want to embarrass myself."

He says, "honey, you got to go out there, your name's on the program, you're scheduled, you got to go out there." She says, "please don't make me." He said, "Honey, you got to go." She says, "Please." He says, "Well, what else do you do?" She says, "Well, I do sing a little bit" and he sent her out there, and she won the Amateur Night performance.

IMANI - FAITH

Imani is the sixth candle and stands for faith. A great illustration of faith in action is the Glide Memorial United Methodist Church in San Francisco. It's been called a model religious institution that can help save America from the social stresses of our time, a church for the twenty-first century.



Under the direction of the Reverend Cecil Williams, Glide has become the city's largest private provider of social services, offering recovery programs for substance abusers, domestic-violence workshops, teaching job-skills, and feeding 3,500 people three times a day.

KWANZAA AT HOME

Every year Marie Booker and her daughter Kathleen invite their family and friends to celebrate Kwanzaa with an evening of drumming, eating and ceremony.

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF KWANZAA

1. UMOJA (UNITY): To strive for and maintain unity in the family, the community, the nation and the race.

2. KUJICHAGULIA (SELF-DETERMINATION): To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves, and speak for ourselves instead of being defined, named, created for and spoken for by others.

3. UJIMA (COLLECTIVE WORK AND RESPONSIBILITY): To build and maintain our community together, and to make our sisters' and brothers' problems our problems and to solve them together.

4. UJAMAA (COOPERATIVE ECONOMICS): To build and maintain our own stores, shops, and other businesses and to profit from them together.

5. NIA (PURPOSE): To make our collective vocation the building and development of our community in order to restore our people and their traditional greatness.

6. KUUMBA (CREATIVITY): To always do as much as we can, in whatever way we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than when we inherited it.

7. IMANI (FAITH): To believe with all our heart in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders, and in the righteousness and victory of our struggle. On the other days of Kwanzaa the candles are snuffed out, but on Imani there are allowed to burn down symbolizing the end of the holiday.

KATHLEEN BOOKER:

It's a bonding time for my mother and I. First and foremost, because this is a tradition that she and I have started and even though we work very hard, it really is a time that shows our love for one another. And we're both very giving, nurturing people and community minded. This is a way to share with each other, and to invite the community at large to open up their hearts, their souls, their minds, and go out and touch someone else. It has a ripple effect.



MARIE BOOKER:

We have friends over, and we have drumming. I find the drumming gets you prepared for the following year. There's something very spiritual about drumming. And we have our Native American friend come over, and do a ceremony. For me, it's a renewal and a preparation for the coming year.



We started Kwanzaa because the children were all grown and out of the house. We got tired of the mundane shopping and spending money. We were interested in community efforts

and coming together, and all of the principles of Kwanzaa that go into making you a better human being.

It's a spiritual celebration, renewal of your moralities, a coming together, a oneness with the universe and a oneness with your friends.

KATHLEEN BOOKER:

Our children need the sense of specialness that comes from participating in a known and loved ritual. They need the mastery of self-discipline that comes from order, they need the self-awareness that comes from a knowledge of their past. They need Kwanzaa as a tool for building their future and our own.

FOODS OF KWANZAA

The next-to-last day of the holiday (December 31) is marked by an elaborate feast called *Kwanzaa Karamu* which utilizes foods from black communities throughout the world: Africa, the American South, the Caribbean, South America. In addition to the food *Karamu* is used to display African culture in music, dance, art and literature.



KATHLEEN BOOKER:

"My menu has always been selected to salute my African-American ancestry and my international life. Each year there's Hoppin' John for luck and collard greens for folding money. There's also roast pork for sheer colored cussedness. A mixture of okra, corn and tomatoes is served with hot peppers to fire us up for the coming year and to remind us of our origins. For intentionality, there's

always a Diaspora dish from the Caribbean, or the Motherland. We also always have a fish because it represents silver coins. It's also luck. We always have some type of African dish because it introduces our community to our culture.

GIFTS OF KWANZAA

Kwanzaa is a time for reflection and introspection. There is a conscious effort to reduce the commercialism that has influenced some of the other holidays that fall at this time of the year. *But it is a holiday, and like any good holiday there are gifts.* The *Zawadi Tray* is filled with gifts for guests to take home. With the exception of the books, all of the gifts should be homemade. Guests make their own selection from the tray.

JESSICA HARRIS

The gifts, or the zawadi, of Kwanzaa are different in that they are gifts that speak to who we are as individuals or as people. They are books about African history about the history of Africans in the Diaspora. They may be records. They are things that are self-made or handmade or things that in some way will instruct and propel and urge the youngsters onward. And the zawadi of Kwanzaa, the gifts of Kwanzaa are for the most part for the young. I think Kwanzaa is an incredible holiday, because it tells the young something about who they are, and it gives them a focus as to where they should go.



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