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Buffalo Kwanzaa

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Buffalo and Kwanzaa

Kwanzaa was first observed in 1966 by its creator Dr. Maulana Karenga. Kwanzaa is an African-American celebration that was initiated by Dr. Karenga as a way for African-Americans to reaffirm their past and culture and the bonds between its people. It is observed from December 26th to January 1st.

Dr. Karenga has often written that this time of the year was chosen because “it allowed us to capitalize on the holiday spirit and orientation already in existence which facilitated the acceptance of a more meaningful holiday. Secondly, the end of the year allowed for saving on gifts and thirdly, it gave Blacks an opportunity to celebrate themselves and history.”

The celebration of Kwanzaa begins with the setting of a Kwanzaa table. The significant symbols of the celebration are: Mazao (crops) which represents the rewards of collective productive labor; Mkeka (mat) which represents the foundation on which all other items are placed; Kinara (candle holder) which holds seven candles and represents African parenthood or the original stalk for which we all sprang; Vibunzi (ears of corn) which represents children – the family places as many ears of corn as there are children. If there are no children, one ear of corn is placed so to represent the potential for children. Zawadi (gifts) which represents the fruits of labor of the parents and the rewards of the seeds sown by the children. Children are the main recipients of Kwanzaa gifts on January 1st. The gifts should always include two items: a book and a heritage symbol.

Kikombe Cha Umoja (unity cup) is used to pour libation and is drunk from by each member of the family in a gesture of praise and commitment. After drinking for the cup, each person says “Harambee” which means “let’s all pull together.” Mishumaa Saba (seven candles) represents the Nzugo Saba (seven principles) the foundation of Kwanzaa. The candles are red, black and green.

The principles were developed from the Theory of Kawaida and speak of a value system that is life-giving and sustaining. Created by Dr. Karenga in 1965, the Nguzo Saba represents “minimum set of principles by which Black people must live in order to begin to receive and reconstruct our history and lives.” Without the Nguzo Saba, Kwanzaa would just be another holiday entrapped in commercial sales.

The Nguzo Saba:

1. **Umoja** (unity) – to strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation and race.
2. **Kujichagulia** (self-determination) – to define ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves instead of being defined, named, created for and spoken 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** (collective economics) – to build and maintain our own stores, shops and other businesses and to profit from them together.
5. **Nia** (purpose) – to make as our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.
6. **Kuumba** (creativity) – to do always as much as we can, in the 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 hearts in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders and the righteousness and the victory of our struggle.

Sharon and Kenneth Holley began participating and celebrating the Kwanzaa holiday in the early 1970s. The Buffalo community celebrated the Kwanzaa holiday at the Watu center on Jefferson Avenue, the Center for Positive Thought on East Utica Street and the African American Cultural Center on Masten Avenue; these were often one-day events. Sharon and Kenneth attended and even participated in these early celebrations that brought the African American community of Buffalo together through dance, music, poetry and dialog. It was these first celebrations that the Kwanzaa Committee of Buffalo came into being. The committee was coordinated by Sharon and Kenneth, from the store Harambee Books and Crafts, which called together the various leaders from the community centers and suggested coordinating the Kwanzaa programs so that there would be no competition for the same day and there would be numerous venues for the public to attend. Sharon and Kenneth Holley have facilitated and became the co-coordinators for the city-wide Kwanzaa program for over 21 years. As a result of the Kwanzaa Committee there are now six nights of celebration in several community centers, churches and other institutions throughout the city of Buffalo. The committee has also produced the journal, fundraising, coordinated the community feast, planned vendor space, did publicity, set-up opening ceremonies and cared for the Kwanzaa symbols and decorations used each year.

References:
http://www.history.com/topics/Kwanzaa-history
http://www.maulanakarenga.org
http://www.fact-archive.com/encyclopedia/maulana_karenga
Buffalo Kwanzaa

Description of Materials:

- Committee Meetings 1980’s
- Committee Meetings 1990’s
- Committee Meetings 2000’s
- Newspaper Clippings 1980’s
- Newspaper Clippings 1990’s
- Newspaper Clippings 2000’s
- Newspaper Clippings undated
- Black Child Fall Journal Fall 1980
- Cards Personal Notes
- Children’s Literature
- Cook Book
- Dr. Maulana Karenga Photos
- History of Kwanzaa
- Honoring Our Youth 1988
- Journal Art
- Pamphlets – Misc.
- Presentation Materials 2006
- Programs 1983-1989
- Programs 1990-1994, 1997
- Songs-Music
- Undated Black & White Photographs
- Undated Color Photographs
- YAR Presents 1991-1992