

Celebrate Kwanzaa!

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 26, 2020

Kwanzaa is a pan-African and African American holiday that celebrates family, community, and culture. Dr. Maulana Karenga, a professor, created the holiday in 1966, in the midst of the Black Liberation Movement, and one year after the “Watts Uprising” tore open the wounds of racial division in Los Angeles. Kwanzaa, which comes from the Swahili phrase, *matunda ya kwanza* (first fruits), is based on African first harvest and week-long celebrations, and was organized to recover and reconstruct African culture and history and unite African people around the world.

The Watts Uprising began on August 11, 1965, when LA police officers pulled over a vehicle with two young African American males, arrested, and fought with them as onlookers gathered. The tension between the crowd and police officers erupted into violence, which led to a six-day riot in the Watts community, a deeply impoverished and segregated African American neighborhood in South Central LA. The uprising resulted in 34 deaths and thousands of injuries and arrests. When it ended on August 16, a study was commissioned and found that racial housing discrimination, unemployment, a non-diverse and militarized police force, etc. were underlying causes of the uprising.

A year later, in 1966, Dr. Maulana Karenga launched Kwanzaa as “a necessary minimum set of principles by which Black people must live to begin to rescue our history and lives” and to increase pride in African culture by highlighting the greatness in African history, omitted from Eurocentric curriculums.

A seven-day holiday, Kwanzaa is celebrated from December 26 to January 1 and is structured around seven core African values, the *Nguzo Saba* (The Seven Principles), which are:

1. Umoja (December 26): Unity – To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community nation and race;
2. Kujichagulia (December 27): Self-Determination – To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves, and speak for ourselves;
3. Ujima (December 28): Collective Work and Responsibility – To build and maintain our community together and make our brother’s and sister’s problems our problems and solve them together;
4. Ujamaa (December 29): Cooperative Economics – To build and maintain our own stores, shops, and other businesses and to profit from them together;
5. Nia (December 30): Purpose – To make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness;

6. Kuumba (December 31): 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 we inherited it; and

7. Imani (January 1): Faith – To believe with all our heart in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders, and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.

On each day of Kwanzaa, participants greet each other with the phrase “Habari Gani,” – What is the news? The answer is that day’s principle. Each night, the family gathers around and lights one of the candles on the Kinara (candle-holder), and discusses the principle represented that day. Kwanzaa is celebrated by millions of people across the globe each year.

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