



CELEBRATING AND LIVING THE NGUZO SABA:
ACCESSING THE AFRICAN IN US
Los Angeles Sentinel, 09-16-21, p.C1

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In CELEBRATING OUR ORGANIZATION US' 56 YEARS and 224 seasons of service, work, struggle and institution-building, we are inevitably and unavoidably led to the *Nguzo Saba*, the Seven Principles of *Kawaida* philosophy and *Kwanzaa*. What follows is an excerpt from my book, *Kawaida: A Communitarian African Philosophy*, which explains their enduring relevance and embrace throughout the world African community. The *Nguzo Saba* are the core values of *Kawaida* philosophy. And they are the most widely known and used concepts of *Kawaida*. In addition to the millions of persons in the world African community who recite, discuss and organize their lives around them during the seven days of *Kwanzaa*, hundreds of organizations also use them as a fundamental value system for their members and the various projects they develop.

Certainly, most independent African schools, and rites of passage programs also use the *Nguzo Saba* as value-orientation and value-grounding. Likewise, the *Nguzo Saba* are used for value-grounding by various kinds of organizations including family maintenance and development programs, Black Student Unions, youth groups, school achievement and retention programs, ex-prisoner programs, prisoner and prisoner support groups, various dependency rehabilitation programs, cultural centers, Black caucuses, artist groups, priest and nun groups, cooperatives and various other organizations, programs and institutions.

The words *Nguzo Saba* are Swahili for The Seven (Saba) Principles (*Nguzo*). *Nguzo* also means pillar, buttress, palisade. As pillars, the principles are that which support and sustain the people, the construction and conduct of their live, as in the phrase "pillar of the community." As a buttress, they are that which uphold and reinforce the people. And as a palisade, they are a wall of defense for the people. These

Seven Principles are: *Umoja* (Unity); *Kujichagulia* (Self-determination); *Ujima* (Collective work and responsibility); *Ujamaa* (Cooperative economics); *Nia* (Purpose); *Kuumba* (Creativity); and *Imani* (Faith).

These Seven Principles are essential standards of personal and social excellence directed toward building and sustaining moral community, and strengthening and maintaining the community's capacity to define, defend and develop its interests in the most positive and productive sense. In addition to being standards of excellence, the *Nguzo Saba* are also categories of priorities and categories of human possibilities. As categories of priorities, they tell us some of the most important things in our lives, identifying a key set of views, values and practices which we should, even must, put first in our personal and social life. And as categories of possibilities, the *Nguzo Saba*, offer us a set of principles which encourage thought and practice which help define, develop and enhance our humanity in the context of community and the world.

Furthermore, the *Nguzo Saba*, which serves as both the core values of *Kawaida* philosophy and the central focus of the African American and pan-African holiday of *Kwanzaa* are a fundamental communitarian value system. They are posed as a moral minimum set of values African Americans need to rescue and reconstruct their lives in their own image and interest and build and sustain an Afrocentric family, community and culture. The Seven Principles were selected in terms of both tradition and reason, that is to say, they were selected from the African communitarian tradition, but were also chosen with an appreciation for where we are now as a people and what challenges we face and must deal with successfully as a people. The aim was to provide a common ground of values and resultant practice that would build, sustain and enhance

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family, community and culture.

Although there are many other communitarian values which could have been chosen, these seven core values, the Nguzo Saba, were specifically selected for four basic reasons. First, they were selected because of their prevalence and recurrence in communitarian African societies, therefore reflecting a Pan-African character. Secondly, these particular values were selected because of their perceived relevance to the liberational project of African Americans, i.e., their struggle for freedom, building family, community and culture and self-consciously contributing to a new history of humankind. Thirdly, these seven core principles were chosen because of the cultural and spiritual significance of seven in African culture. And finally, they were selected because of the manageability of the number seven in terms of teaching, learning and core emphasis.

Having accepted the centrality of culture and the values which undergird it, the task was to study communitarian African cultural values and choose and establish the ones which would best serve the interests and aspirations of the African American family, community and culture. In terms of the interest and aspirations of African American people, the Nguzo Saba were developed and offered as an Afrocentric value system which would serve the following basic functions. First, it was to aid in organizing and enriching our relations with each other

on personal and community level. Second, they were developed to establish Afrocentric standards, commitments and priorities that would tend to enhance our human possibilities as persons and a people.

Also, the Nguzo Saba were developed and offered to the world African community to aid in the recovery and reconstruction of lost historical memory and cultural legacy in the development of an Afrocentric paradigm of life and achievement. In addition, they were developed and offered to serve as a contribution to a core system of communitarian ethical values for the moral guidance and instruction of the community, especially for children. And finally, the Nguzo Saba were developed as an African-centered value system to contribute to an ongoing and expanding use of Afrocentric communitarian values which would aid in bringing into being a new man, woman and child who self-consciously participate in the ethical project of starting a new history of African people and humankind.

IN A WORD, THE INTENTION OF THE VALUE system, *Nguzo Saba*, like the intention of the holiday, *Kwanzaa*, on which the holiday turns, is to remember and access the African in us and to use it, not only to come into the fullness of ourselves, but also to increase and sustain African and human good and the well-being of the world.▲

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