



50TH ANNIVERSARY FOUNDER'S KWANZAA STATEMENT

KWANZAA, THE NGUZO SABA AND OUR CONSTANT STRIVING: REPAIRING, RENEWING AND REMAKING THE WORLD

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY of the pan-African holiday, *Kwanzaa*, of necessity brings added focus and emphasis on its customary call for remembrance, reflection and recommitment. We remember our history and the legacies left and the people who made and left them for us and the world. We reflect on the expansive meaning of being African in the world, on the context and issues of our times, and on our way forward in struggle to forge a future responsive to our needs and interests as well as those of the world. And we recommit ourselves to our highest values, to our most anchoring, elevating and liberating practices, and as ever to the good of our people and the well-being of the world.

At this historical milestone and marker, it is good to remember and reflect on the origins of *Kwanzaa*, not only in the ancient African festivals of harvest and shared good, but also its origins in the relentless and righteous struggles of the Sixties, i.e., the Black Freedom Movement for freedom, justice, equality, and power of our people over their destiny and daily lives. For deeply embedded and ever-present in the celebration of *Kwanzaa* and the practice of its founding principles, the *Nguzo Saba*, is the constant call for and commitment to striving and struggling. Here, I use striving and struggling interchangeably, with the meaning being exerting great and focused effort to achieve, excel and advance. For the struggle, as we imagined and waged it and continue to do so, is not only to defy and defeat the oppressor, but also to overturn ourselves, removing from ourselves the legacy of oppression, clearing social space in which we can

live, love, work, build and relate freely, and striving diligently then to come into the fullness of ourselves.

Kwanzaa, then, was conceived, born and came into being in the midst of struggle, in the fires and furnaces of the Black Freedom Movement, and therefore carries within it this legacy and the lessons from it. This 50-year journey from 1966-2016 or 6206-6256 was one of great and decisive striving and struggle. It was a journey of striving and struggle that began in the Black Power period of the Black Freedom Movement and without digression or diversion has continued to deal with issues of life and death, of freedom and justice, security from vigilante and police violence, securing adequate healthcare and housing for the needy, economic justice for all, quality education and a host of other interrelated issues. So, *Kwanzaa* is neither engaged nor celebrated outside of the life of Black people, African people. It raises critical issues as well as the honored names and righteous deeds of the ancestors, engages questions in current life as well as history, of modes and means of resistance as well as celebrations of gains made lives well-lived battles well fought and won, and the goodness of life which our ancestors and we have worked and struggled so hard to bring into being, increase and sustain.

On this 50th anniversary celebration of *Kwanzaa*, it is only right and appropriate that we pay rightful homage to those who brought us to this good and beautiful point. First, we offer sacred water and words first to our ancestors, ancient and modern, for the culture they created, the battles they fought,

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the lessons they taught, the legacies they left and the ways they opened for us. The 50th anniversary celebration is also in honor and thanks to our people, African Americans and African peoples everywhere. For it is they who embraced Kwanzaa when it was offered to them, received it as their own, nurtured it and made it the national and international celebration of our African selves and the history and culture that grounds us and gives us identity, purpose and direction. Honor and *asante* (thanks) are also due to my organization Us, the critical context in which Kwanzaa was conceived and created, first accepted, first practiced and begun as a living tradition. Moreover, homage and honor are due to the Black Liberation Movement which embraced and spread the practice of Kwanzaa, taught the values, the *Nguzo Saba*, and used these principles to undergird and inform a myriad of programs and projects of liberation, and family and community building.

Kwanzaa is clearly a celebration of family, community and culture, but it is also a celebration of freedom, an act of freedom and an instrument of freedom. It is an act of freedom in its recovery and reconstruction of African culture, our return to its best values and practices and our resistance to the imposition of Eurocentric ways of understanding and engaging the world. Kwanzaa was also conceived as an instrument of struggle, to raise and cultivate the consciousness of the people, to unite them around principles that anchored and elevated their lives and involve them in the struggle to be themselves and free themselves and build the just and good world we all want, work for and deserve. And thus, Kwanzaa is a celebration of freedom, of the freedom struggle itself in which Kwanzaa is grounded, a celebration of our choosing to free our-

selves and be ourselves, as Africans, and to rejoice in the richness of our history and culture of awesome and audacious striving and struggle.

And in these times of winter storms and worst weather to come, let us find in the celebration of Kwanzaa remembrance, reflection and recommitment which speaks to our constant striving and struggle to bring and sustain good in the world, indeed, to repair, renew and remake ourselves in the process and practice of repairing, renewing and remaking the world. For in a real sense, the history of Kwanzaa mirrors the history of our people, striving ever upward, refusing to be diverted, dispirited or defeated. And we have reached a crossroads where we need to draw upon all our inner strength, keep the faith, hold the line and not yield an inch or iota to evil and injustice anywhere.

Let us hold fast, then, to our African value system, the *Nguzo Saba*, that has won the heart and minds of millions throughout the world African community. The *Nguzo Saba*, The Seven Principles, begin with the principle of *Umoja* (Unity). For we come into being and best express and develop our humanity in relationship. Although others may teach hate, hostility, alienation and animosity, we must raise up the essentiality of rightful relatedness, principled togetherness and an at-oneness with each other and the world which promises mutual respect, peace with justice and the shared good of the world.

The principle of *Kujichagulia* (Self-Determination) reaffirms the right and responsibility of every people to control their destiny and daily lives and to be respected as a unique and equally valid and valuable way of being human in the world. Moreover, the principle of *Ujima* (Collective work and Responsibility) reaffirms that together we must

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build the good world we want and deserve to live in and that we must share the good we cultivate and harvest together. It speaks of an ethics of sharing of the good of society and the world.

Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics) commits us to the principle and practice of shared work and wealth. It stresses our kinship with others and the environment and appreciation for the need for a just and equitable distribution of the good for everyone so that all can live lives of dignity and decency. The principle of *Nia* (Purpose) commits us to work for the realization of the collective vocation of restoring African people to their rightful power and proper place in the world and to constantly bring good in the world. It calls us to greatness measured by good deeds not by war or technological wonders. For the *Husia* says, "the wise are known for their wisdom, but the great are known for their good deeds."

Kuumba (Creativity) commits us to work to build a world that is more beautiful and beneficial than what we inherited. And it reminds us of the ancient ethical imperative of *serudj ta* to constantly repair, renew

and remake the world as well as ourselves. For we are indeed *injured physicians* who have it within themselves to heal, repair, renew and remake themselves. But we can only complete the process by remaking, i.e., eliminating and rebuilding, the social source of our injury and wounding, in a word an oppressive society.

And finally, *Imani* (Faith) rejects the idea of a funded faith and a religion in service to oppression. Indeed, it teaches us to believe in the good, the right and the possible and in the righteousness and victory of our constant striving and struggle to expand the realms of freedom, justice and peace and lay a solid basis for human flourishing and the well-being of the world. And *Imani* reminds us to keep the faith of our foreparents who taught us this enduring ethical obligation: to know our past and honor it; to engage our present and improve it; and to imagine a whole new future and forge it in the most ethical, effective and expansive ways.

Dr. Maulana Karenga, Professor and Chair of Africana Studies, California State University-Long Beach; Executive Director, African American Cultural Center (Us); Creator of Kwanzaa; and author of *Kwanzaa: A Celebration of Family, Community and Culture*, *Essays on Struggle: Position and Analysis*, and recent publication: *The Message and Meaning of Kwanzaa: Bringing good Into the World*.

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