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Is the Real Meaning of Kwanzaa Being Lost?

Worrill's World

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There are countless examples of African people, throughout the world, creating ideas aimed at the upliftment of African people and when the people catch on to the idea, someone outside our community (European and Asians) taps into the idea for their own commercial benefit.

At this moment in history, we find this occurring with the African in America holiday celebrate called Kwanzaa. This African in America celebration was initiated by the US Organization and Dr. Maulana Karenga in Los Angeles, California in 1966.

In this context, "Kwanzaa was created to introduce and reinforce seven basic values of African culture which contribute to building and reinforcing community among African people in America as well as Africans throughout the world African community."

It is further explained that "The values are called the Nguzo Saba which in the Pan African language of Swahili means the Seven Principles. These principles stand at the heart of the origin and meaning of Kwanzaa, for it is these values which are not only the building blocks for community but serve also as its social glue."

These Seven Principles, the Nguzo Saba, are Umoja / Unity, Kujichagulia / Self Determination, Ujima / Collective Work and Responsibility, Ujamaa / Cooperative Economics, Nia / Purpose, Kuumba / Creativity, and Imani / Faith.

It was the Pan African / Nationalist Movement in America that embraced the idea of Kwanzaa in the late 1960s and began to organize Kwanzaa activities at the community level throughout the United States. The seven days of Kwanzaa are celebrated from December 26th through January 1st.

The Pan African / Nationalist Movement met great opposition from the so-called established leadership and a segment of the African masses who felt that Kwanzaa was an attempt to establish a new religion, that it was opposed to Christianity and Christ, and that its aim was to replace Christmas. All of these were false notions regarding the true meaning of Kwanzaa and the Pan African / Nationalist Movement spent enormous energy and effort, over the years, to explain the true meaning of Kwanzaa. Kwanzaa is not a religion, but it has a spiritual foundation. African people from all religious persuasions participate in Kwanzaa. Kwanzaa was not created to replace Christmas and many African people who acknowledge and celebrate Christmas also acknowledge and participate in Kwanzaa.

Because of the great educational campaigns of the Pan African / Nationalist Movement, these early misconceptions of Kwanzaa have now been thoroughly dismantled.

The concept of Kwanzaa as we have historically understood it, and helped develop it, over the last forty-six years, is a cultural project that strikes at the roots of Black Power. That is the ability of a people to define themselves in the context of their own experiences. The idea of defining ourselves in our own image and interests is at the heart of the Black / Pan African / Nationalist Movement out of which Kwanzaa developed.

Kwanzaa was never aimed at integration, but rather the national interests of African people in America as a self determining body of people.

Kwanzaa has become an aspect of our national identity as more than twenty million African people in America participate in some aspect of Kwanzaa.

Because of this tremendous market that has been created by the Pan African / Nationalist led Kwanzaa Movement, it is our challenge to defeat those forces who are attempting to dilute and disrupt the real significance of Kwanzaa. Some may say this should be anticipated in a capitalistic world. But that does not mean we don't struggle against

turning Kwanzaa into a capitalistic venture controlled by the forces of the white corporate world and their African in America allies.

One of the biggest mistakes the Pan African / Nationalist Movement made, as we reflect on this growing tendency to commercialize Kwanzaa, is that we did not create a legal structure through incorporation, copyright law, and patents to protect Kwanzaa. Kwanzaa has become a free for all, that many people use to do whatever they want with Kwanzaa and in many instances it has nothing to do with the real meaning of Kwanzaa.

It is important to note that in Dr. Karenga's book, *Kwanzaa: A Celebration of Family, Community, and Culture*, published in 1997 by the University of Sankore Press, he explains his position on the commercialization of Kwanzaa. He states that, "The challenges, for the African in America community as well as African communities everywhere is to resist the corporate commercialization of Kwanzaa; to affirm and hold to the essential meaning of Kwanzaa and refuse to cooperate with the corporate drive to dominate and redefine it and make it simply another holiday to maximize sales."

Karenga says that "Kwanzaa is above all a cultural practice not a commercial one and external and internal attempts to redefine Kwanzaa in commercial terms are not defining Kwanzaa, but rather their commercial interest in it."

We must control what we create - that is, we must control all aspects of our culture. Our songs, dances, writings, and art must be protected from hostile and thieving aliens (internal and external).

No longer should other races define who we are and what we should be just because they have the wealth to exploit what we create. We must preserve the *Sacredness and Integrity of Kwanzaa*.

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