



Civil Rights Museum Offers Kwanzaa 2021 *A Virtual Celebration*

“The application of Kwanzaa’s principles releases spiritual power,” states Sage Chioma, the Civil Rights Museum’s Virtual Kwanzaa 2021 program organizer.

The new exhibit and program in celebration of Kwanzaa at the International Civil Rights Center & Museum offers a chance to invest in would be called our collective conscience, using humanitarian, faith-reflecting principles to enrich our community. For many people, Kwanzaa remains something of a mystery; but it can be forthrightly viewed as the African American cultural response to Christmas or Hanukkah. As people unravel the “mystery” of Kwanzaa, they quickly realize the weightier life-affirming values with which it deals.

“Kwanzaa’s meaning is bigger than race,” explains La’ Tonya Wiley, ICRCM Events Coordinator and Kwanzaa exhibit designer. “It’s not about a religion. It’s about the foundations of the universal community, taking us out of self.”

IS KWANZAA LIKE CHRISTMAS?

Yes and No.

Of course, Kwanzaa and Christmas share the same week in December, the same holiday season, and even a tradition of exchanging gifts. However, in the views of many, the commercialization of Christmas, outgrowing its own religious and altruistic roots, increasingly contrasts with Kwanzaa as a celebration of a community’s annual pursuit of healing — mentally, spiritually, emotionally, and financially. Kwanzaa’s unique holiday celebration focuses less on a particular faith, and more on practical application of the principles that make communities whole, along with the families that comprise them. With its seven days of dedication to these stabilizing and enriching principles, Kwanzaa offers a strong alternative to the stresses of a holiday season that is well known otherwise for its high-intensity emotional demands.

THE CREATOR AND HIS CREATION

Dr. Maulana Karenga responded to the turmoil of the 1965 Watts Riots in Los Angeles by designing a way to bring fractured communities together. His focus was on reconnecting the African-American community’s involuntary dislocation from its roots in Africa. Dr. Karenga modeled the Kwanzaa celebration after many of the traditional African harvest ceremonies. His intent was to create one occasion a year, when for seven days, African Americans might rediscover cultural values that had been lost or put in jeopardy as a persisting consequence of the

African slave trade and its aftermath. A race of people forcibly transported to another continent had been deprived of a sense of identity and knowledge of its history.

And yet, even under conditions of systematic inequality, the sorts of initiative that distinguished the non-violent and self-affirming activists of the Civil Rights Movement embodied values that would be more specifically codified in the principles of Kwanzaa. The Sit-Ins of 1960 in this community supply a key reference point. “Greensboro’s *A&T Four* are examples of the Kwanzaa principles being effectively applied — which include self-determination, unity, and purpose,” stated Sage Chioma.

SEARCHING FOR MEANING

Dr. Karenga derived Kwanzaa’s name from the Swahili phrase “matunda ya kwanza,” which means “first fruits.” The story goes that the extra “a” was added at the end of “Kwanzaa” to accommodate the seven children who each wanted to represent a letter during the first ever Kwanzaa celebration in 1966.

The original word Kwanza itself simply means “fruit,” and “first fruits” is a common phrase and practice observed in biblical worship traditions. The Kwanzaa name alone signals an unfamiliar culture and language, with the prospect that the apparent strangeness might spur an interest in discovery. But many people may not have allowed themselves to exert the cultural curiosity to discover they have more in common with Kwanzaa than they realize. These universal benefits make the Museum’s Kwanzaa 2021 presentations vitally important to improving the health and interconnection of the parts that make up Greensboro’s whole community. The Museum’s La’ Tonya Wiley expounds on this idea with an epigram: “Our village will suffer or benefit, based on the actions of the village.”

KWANZAA FOR THE LONG RUN

Kwanzaa has been steadily growing in popularity over its 45 years of its existence. Millions of people throughout the United States and around the world celebrate Kwanzaa to identify with their Pan African roots, and to re-center the focus and strategy for collective well-being. American Presidents, as far back as President Clinton, have acknowledged Kwanzaa’s significance during this season by issuing holiday statements. The United States Postal Service has also made Kwanzaa a part of its collection of holiday postage stamps — a clear indication of the inroads Kwanzaa has made, claiming its own distinctive seat at the table of America’s diverse holiday culture.

KWANZAA FOR EVERYONE

Sometimes dismissed as exclusively an “African tradition,” the Principles of Kwanzaa are that tradition’s gift to humanity. Kwanzaa may have been created with a specific population in mind, but its usefulness to the globe is evident, and it insists on broader adoption for the

improvement of our world. The ICRCM's Kwanzaa event planners envision the application of Kwanzaa's principles as being powerful enough to point the way to the alleviation of some of America's blights, such as racism and homelessness.

This is a cultural holiday, meant to be celebrated and applied by any global citizen belonging to a community. Kwanzaa is special in that regard. At the root of the Kwanzaa celebration is the family, which represents the core foundation of a healthy community. It is during the seven-days of Kwanzaa that families are urged to stop everything routine and incidental while they come together to participate in these ceremonies. "Families coming together is at the heart of any sane and just society," asserted Sage Chioma.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE PRINCIPLES

Kwanzaa's seven constructive principles are dynamic and all-encompassing, yet they are only as good as their purposeful application. The ICRCM'S event organizers stress that awareness of these principles is not good enough. For them to have world changing impact on the community, they must be learned more deeply and applied more intentionally.

The seven principles of Kwanzaa, as determined by Dr. Karenga, are allocated too these days of observance:

- *umoya* – "unity" (Dec. 26).
- *kujichagulia* – "self-determination" (Dec. 27).
- *ujima* – "collect work and responsibility" (Dec. 28).
- *ujamaa* – "cooperative economics" (Dec. 29).
- *nia* – "purpose" (Dec. 30).
- *kuumba* – "creativity" (Dec. 31).
- *imani* – "faith" (Jan. 1).

WHY DON'T MORE PEOPLE CELEBRATE KWANZAA?

Despite Kwanzaa's steady growth, there have been some stumbling blocks slowing its universal acceptance. And in turn, a large portion of the global community's understanding about how to uplift itself and its neighbors may be hindered. One such stumbling block has been the resistance to cultures that may not be seen as conventionally-American-based.

This type of "fixed mindset" ignores a Kwanzaa principle's capacity to address our shared humanity, as individuals and as a collective. Whatever the perceived barriers to embracing Kwanzaa might be — race, religion, or language —these are really only distractions. Kwanzaa is not a religious tradition. It is a people tradition; a cultural expression for every person.

And still, many of the misunderstandings about Kwanzaa are rampant throughout groups for whom Kwanzaa is naturally familiar. Some African Americans see Kwanzaa as a symbol of

pride in ownership. These persons may tend to categorize the Kwanzaa holiday as a “Black thing” and may even want it to stay that way. But this mindset diminishes the full potential of Kwanzaa’s ability to heal and enhance disparate groups of people through connection in a larger community.

CELEBRATE KWANZAA 2021 WITH ICRCM

On Dec. 26, the day after Christmas, the International Civil Rights Center & Museum begins its Seven-Night Virtual Kwanzaa Event. A different speaker each night will give an educational and instructional video presentation for each principle of Kwanzaa. Kwanzaa 2021 aims to introduce the Greensboro community and beyond to a new cultural norm. This is the first year of virtual Kwanzaa presentations with a highly qualified slate of speakers at the Museum. Each night, visitors to the virtual Kwanzaa events will be welcomed as guests to a deep-dive into the corresponding principles.

The speakers will provide more than a historical recitation of facts or a summary of definitions. They uncover and analyze the meaning behind their specific principle, share insights, and expand on topics, making every night of Kwanzaa’s presentations a potentially life-enhancing event. Hailing from traditions of religious ministry and community activism, the presenters are situated to be able to impart not only a deeper meaning of the principles, but also ideas about their practical application.

THE INTERNATIONAL CIVIL RIGHTS CENTER & MUSEUM MISSION

Animating an iconic landmark recognized across the globe, the International Civil Rights Center & Museum opened in 2010 as a comprehensive museum of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and an innovative educational organization devoted to understanding and advancing civil and human rights in this country and the world. It commemorates the Feb. 1, 1960, beginning of sit-ins at a whites-only lunch counter in Greensboro, by the N.C. A&T Four college students, reflecting careful planning carried out with colleagues at Bennett College. Their non-violent direct action challenged the American People to make good on promises of personal equality and civic inclusion enunciated in the Constitution. The fast-spreading Sit-In Movement ignited by the Greensboro protests served as a historical inflection point, renewing the Civil Rights Movement as a whole. Sit-In Movement, Inc. was founded in 1993 to acquire and restore the F.W. Woolworth's site of these transformative events and to establish the Center and Museum as a monument to the bravery and initiative of visionary young advocates of full citizenship and social justice.

To participate in this aspect of our mission, and in our on-going story of community belonging, feel free to make a contribution. It is because of our generous sponsors, donors, and friends that we are able to operate with excellence. Vitally important holiday programs like our Virtual Kwanzaa 2021 Event are made possible by our donors. To donate to the International Civil Rights Center & Museum, [click here](#).