

What Kwanzaa really means

by Lanita Duke

Grassroot News, N.W.—Afro-Americans have influenced music, politics and religion in America. One aspect of their influence is felt even in this holiday week. They have a holiday. It is called "Kwanzaa."

Kwanzaa is a Swahili word for "first fruits." In West Africa it is called a harvest celebration. But in Black communities across the country, Kwanzaa represents a value system they created in reason, tradition and need.

This side of self-determination was adopted by Maulana Ron Karenga of the U.S. cultural organization. He felt the need to establish a time for Afro-Americans to dedicate their hearts, minds and bodies to the seven principles of Blackness called the Nguzo Saba.

Kwanzaa is rooted in these principles. They are: Umoja (Unity), Kujichagulia (Self-determination), Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility), Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics), Nia (Purpose), Kumba (Creativity) and Imani (Faith).

Kwanzaa lasts seven days and each day a Kwanzaa ceremony takes place. The ceremony is not a seminar, workshop, lecture, conference or convention. It is a time to develop a philosophy for the coming year and to slow down and regroup.

Kwanzaa is a time to pay tribute to Afro-American and African ancestors. A unity cup is passed around and participants make an offering with a thought.

For those dissatisfied with the commercialization of Christmas, Kwanzaa represents more substantial principles and commitments. It provides an alternative tradition which better defines Afro-Americans, because it gives them the freedom to define and help themselves.

In Los Angeles the Kwanzaa Foundation feeds 5,000 needy people. They also provide clothes and toys to those in the area.

The sixth night of Kwanzaa in-



Kerel Abasi Taylor, son of Jamila and Abasi Taylor, is presented to the community completing his naming ceremony during the second night of Kwanzaa held at the Black Educational Center. (Photo: Richard J. Brown)

volves a Karamu (feast) which consists of seven ingredients: food, drink, music, dance, conversation, laughter and ceremony.

Joyce Harris, director of the Black Educational Center, said, "Most Black people will celebrate Christmas. But Kwanzaa is a separate, special holiday for Black people."

Many of the symbols incorpo-

ated in Kwanza are symbols of the Black Liberation Movement in America. The theme colors are red, black and green. Red is for the blood they've shed; black is for the color; and green is for the land.

The symbols of life, corn and a horn of plenty dress the Kwanzaa table. On each night of Kwanzaa a candle is lit to start a devotion to one of the principles of Blackness.

Although Afro-Americans cannot celebrate the harvesting of an actual crop, the first fruits are the concrete works they have built and are beginning to build as they fight for freedom.

The first fruits are the changes that are beginning to take place in their minds and lives. Kwanzaa is the celebration of survival.

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