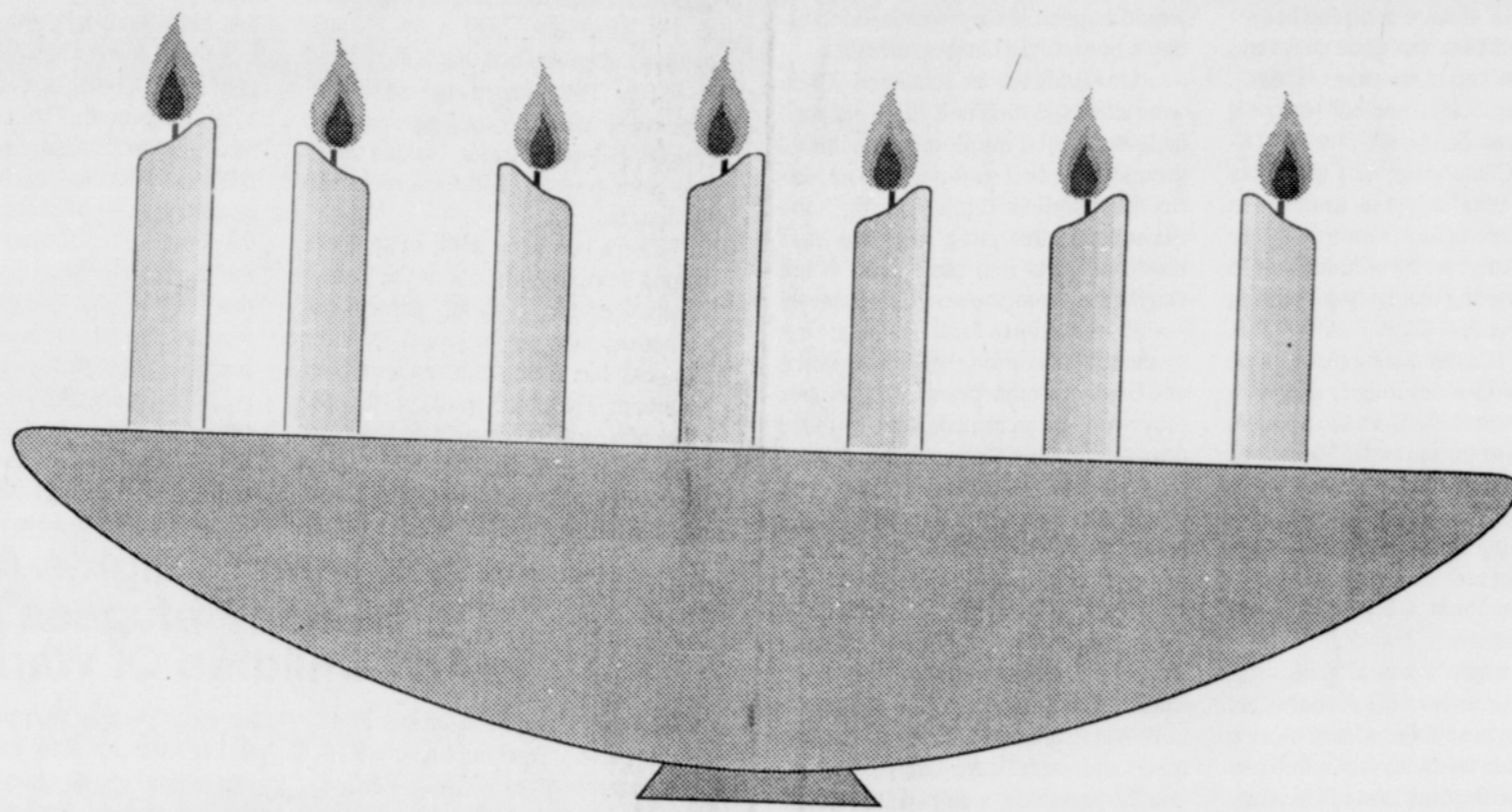


The Portland Observer 25¢

HAPPY KWANZAA



Time To Celebrate African-American Roots

During this holiday, December 26 thru January 1, tens of millions of African-Americans will honor those who have gone before, the living presence of a people, and those who will follow. Seven evenings of beautiful, solemn or festive celebrations will see nationwide gatherings of Black people to honor their faith, strength and determination to secure a viable future against all odds.

The Kwanzaa holiday was founded in 1966 by Dr. Mulana Ron Karenga, a renowned African-American professor of Black History. The structure, including homage, feasts, fashions, decorations, icons and an African Market-place, is in the fashion of ancient and contemporary African agricultural celebrations of harvest and thanksgiving. These eons-old traditions antedate all other of mankind's recognition of value systems and spirituality.

Given the steadily increasing participation of community leaders and organizations, it is expected that this year's Kwanzaa celebration will be the most successful and meaningful to date. There will be lectures and panel discussions which will examine the many issues critical to the well being of the community and its residents. And there will be speakers whose expertise and responsibilities will

lend credence to their analyses. The festival nature of Kwanzaa will reveal itself in the incomparable panorama of African food, music, dance and drumming, when a magnificent African Bazaar will be set up for shoppers--and the day for Karami, the Big Feast.

If one sees symbols and icons which might suggest that Dr. Karenga has invented a religion, that is not the case at all. These who have read Professor McKinley Burt's column "Perspectives" for the past four years will immediately appreciate that Western Civilization has--from the Greeks onward--always turned toward Africa and the African for its spiritual sustenance, as well as the other facets of culture, and for its technology. But as the great cycle of an eternal world has been turning through its western phase of wars, pestilence, slavery, racism, atomic bombs and an alleged "conquest of space," we note a parallel and traumatic alienation of mankind as he has been wrenched from his spiritual roots. Who can sing a spiritual, really?

This pitiful mindset has been best expressed this century through the voices of those who have been labeled the "Existential Philosophers" (Sarte-Hei-

degger, et al) who, spiritually bankrupt, gave the cry, "God is dead!" It is not strange that this sad state of affairs coincided with the arrogant revisionist program to reject all things African in the historic literature and even the Bibles of the world. Under the aegis of the new Neanderthals, the woolly-headed patriarches and law-givers of the Judeo-Christian Bibles and literature have become pale, soulless narrators of events now described as "folklore."

Ironically, at the very same time the most renown of modern scientists ran into an absolute dead end trying to follow Einstein into a universe of relativity and quantum theory. They now say that "in the beginning" there was a Big Bang wherein the universe was created instantaneously from a void which cannot be comprehended by the human mind. This is exactly what the Africans said 6,000 years earlier: "Spirit moved on the face of the primitive Nu--" (God) created myself out of nothing." How fortunate we are that our forefathers wrote in stone and upon papyrus--still to be found in Ethiopia, Nubia and Egypt and displayed in Muslims throughout the world. There is still hope.

Leadership, Then And Now; Conclusion

As I stated earlier, this series was formulated in sort of a national arena, given that I solicited opinions from across the country (by mail or fax) and also sought a number of local viewpoints. However, I have been most influenced in the structural sense by the opinion of a man I met many years ago in Washington, D.C. while he was recruiting students for the Atlanta University "Dual Degree Program" (Science & Humanities).

Now president of one of the "Traditional Black Colleges," he suggested that a short series of this type would be most useful as a report on the general dynamics and directions of the current leadership--than would be an attempt to adequately analyze either individual organizations or performances within such a constricted framework. "If you plan on functioning in your community in any meaningful

manner other than a writer [and I do], you don't want to spend the next year trying to respond to an angry, neglected or suspicious constituency." Well put, my man.

Several weeks ago I cited several early, quite successful black entrepreneurs ("Then"), commenting on how much they were able to accomplish without television--nationwide organization, marketing and distribution. Now, there are number of magazines published by African Americans that are directed toward inspiring and supporting black business. As valuable as the how-to-do-it articles are, the documented "success" stories can have even more of an impact (see "Black Enterprise-Emerge-Dollars And Sense"). New leaders in the field of commerce are coming on strong.

From these journals we learn that several black entrepreneurs seem to have

mastered not just the large scale super-market concept but also chain distribution at the level of several dozen stores. This was to be expected some years ago except for the racist constraints of financing and/or securing satisfactory leaseholds. For years (as in Portland), blacks have held managerial jobs in this field and others but have been restricted to producing wealth for others--the new plantation!

On the othe side of the coin we see a failure in leadership that is hard to explain. From my clippings of articles in the black press around the country (and as you've seen on television), in some urban centers blacks are marching and picketing against an "invasion of Asian-owned small stores." Many blacks (finally) are becoming as incredulous as "Tony Brown" that in cities like New York where African Americans have BILLIONS in buying power, you would

have black lawyers and activists screaming on the sidewalk instead of SETTING UP A STORE A WEEK. How long before their counterparts will be marching here. I don't think more college education will help, do you?

Other areas of business are showing the same escalation of will and purpose. In Iowa we have a black man who formed a small group to purchase several hundred miles of railroad that the Union Pacific was abandoning. Developing new concepts of personal and innovative services for farmers and distributors he is making quite a success of the venture. Women are showing a significant increase in both professional and merchandising fields--this fact is extremely important, considering the disintegration of the job market.

While in Portland we have several blacks now who have perceived the opportunities and necessity for larger-

scale housing development (within the federal framework), there is nothing here like the privately owned, African American owned projects in the south (No one seems to have noticed that even Russia is giving up collectives and going for the gold). Without capital in a capitalistic world--and the choices and opportunities that come with it--you will be either a slave or a serf no matter what the politicians or activists tell you. (Note that sixty years ago Portland blacks were developing multiple housing).

A recurrent commentary on leadership and organizations is about a failure to issue timely and accurate financial reports. This is coming from all areas and black citizens are asking "are they lazy, incompetent, or is it just CONTEMPT?" And again from the grass-roots people who write in to the black newspapers: "What is the use of sending our kids to college?" However, young

blacks in the east and south are challenging both industry and state environmental agencies over the trend of dumping the nations trash (including medical waste) in counties that are predominately African American. The African nations rebelled years ago against the shipments from Europe and America.

It is noted, too, that in many parts of the country blacks have brought a new perspective to the problem of gangs and unreachable youth. You may have seen on "PBS" the innovative program in Texas that recognizes just how energetic, intelligent and adventurous teenagers are. There has been 5% recidivism in a program that puts 100 youths on the road at the time in caravans of mule-drawn wagons in the mode (and uniforms) of the fabled black cavalry. They cook, horseshoe, repair, go to class and earn a stipend. There is hope.

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