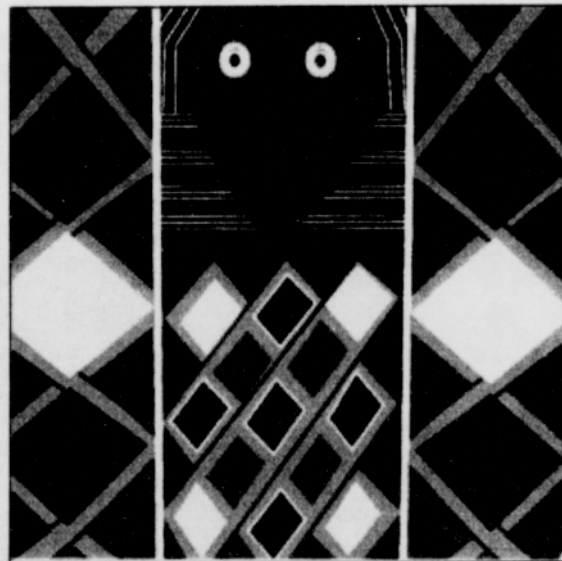


KWANZAA; celebrating the days with meaning

BY CLYDE W. FORD
FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

I first remember celebrating Kwanzaa during the tumultuous 60's. A Kwanzaa "industry" has now matured, boasting everything from Kwanzaa cards to "Kwanzaa Sales" at major department stores to Kwanzaa dolls decked out in African garb. I look at these developments with a mixture of pride and skepticism. On one hand, it is gratifying to see Kwanzaa accepted into American culture. Still, I worry this very acceptance is gutting the holiday of its intended meaning and purpose. I do believe it is possible to celebrate Kwanzaa in a way which keeps the meaning of the holiday alive in your life.

Like any holiday, Kwanzaa is identified with a set of principles, symbols and rituals. Over the years, I've begun to observe Kwanzaa by embracing the basic principles and symbols, but discarding the "pre-packaged" interpretations and instructions. I begin with Nguzo Saba, the seven daily principles which are the pillars of Kwanzaa. Rather than just reread



the traditional definitions of these principles, I use each principle as

the basis of a question that I ask myself during Kwanzaa.

Day 1 UMOJA (UNITY). Umoja, a Swahili word, is also translated as oneness or wholeness and my first question is: How do I experience wholeness and oneness in my life? Here my thoughts turn to my physical, emotional and spiritual health; my relationship to nature and the earth; and my connectedness to life.

Day 2 KUJICHAGULIA (SELF-DETERMINATION). This Swahili word has an original meaning closer to self-selection, self-chosen or authentic. I ask myself on this second day: In what ways am I leading an authentic life? I reaffirm my commitment to try to live my life by the dictates of my own conscience, and not by dogmas and doctrines supplied to me from some external source.

Day 3 UJIMA (COLLECTIVE WORK AND RESPONSIBILITY). On day three, the question that informs my is: How can I lead a life of service to

others? I would like to feel that the actions I take in my life bring some benefit, no matter how small, to the lives of others.

Day 4 UJAMAA (COOPERATIVE ECONOMICS). In Swahili, the word means familyhood, brotherhood, and relationship. So, on this fourth day of Kwanzaa, I question: Who is my family, and what are the important relationships in my life? My definition of family is very broad. It includes my biological and ethnic family, but it extends beyond both to encompass the family of humankind.

I reflect upon the significant relationships in my life and how Love is that important force which binds together all human relationships.

Day 5 NIA (PURPOSE). This fifth day of Kwanzaa I query: Where do I find meaning and purpose in my life? I want to know to what extent my passions are my pursuits in life. Am I doing the work I love, or the

(Please see Kwanzaa page 9)

The Bridge Builders Third Annual Kwanzaa Gala and Gentlemen's Ball will be held at 7 p.m. on Sunday, December 26 at the Portland Marriott Hotel, located at 1401 SW Naito Parkway (formerly Front Avenue).

The Bridge Builders is a rites of passage program for African-American male teens in the Portland metropolitan area. The program teaches male teens the tools necessary to become men. Those tools are spirituality, scholarship, cultural awareness, time management, time spent with positive adults, community service and respect.

The Kwanzaa Gala and Gentlemen's Ball is the culmination of a four year rites of passage program.

The program challenges African-American high school males to excel academically and personally.

All youths in the program are required to complete a rigorous skill-building curriculum and abide by a strict code of conduct. During their senior year, each student is expected to demonstrate growth in harmony with the seven barometers of manhood.

Last year, more than 700 community residents attended the

second annual Kwanzaa Gala and Gentlemen's Ball. That meant that Bridge Builders were able to present more than \$10,000 to 11 college freshmen.

Tickets are available at all Ticketmaster locations including GI Joe's and Meir & Frank or charge by phone at 503/224-4400. Tickets are also available at Best of All worlds, Mona's Ethnic Fabrics and Fashions, Mrs. C's Wigs, Naira & Kobo African Imports and Sheba's House of Elegance.

For more information about Bridge Builders and the Kwanzaa Gala Gentlemen's Ball, please call 503/285-1165.

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