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Four youngsters, from left, Shannon Hall, Danielle Holley, Kennan Holley and Kirk Brown, are on hand for the observance of Kwanzaa.

Principle of Unity Is the Focus On Opening Night of Kwanzaa

By ROD WATSON

Nearly 40 people braved near-zero temperatures and swirling snow Monday night to celebrate the opening of Kwanzaa, the Afro-American holiday founded on the seven principles of united progress.

But the ones who made that much of a sacrifice to show up were not the ones who needed to be there, a Canisius College sociology professor said.

Opening-night speaker Jesse Nash talked about the meaning of unity, the first of the seven principles, in ceremonies in the Langston Hughes Institute, 25 High St.

"Unity means that we are a 'we.' If we were a 'we,' this building couldn't hold us tonight," Professor Nash said. "The tragedy is the folks who are not here, but we've got to find a way to reach them."

The Kwanzaa celebration started

in the mid-1960s to express black awareness and reinforce the importance of the principles of unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity and faith.

Professor Nash stressed unity, using several metaphors to get across his point that blacks can find strength through unity without losing individual qualities.

"A quarter is worth something ... each of us is worth something ... but we're worth more when we're joined together," just as quarters are worth more when they combine to form a dollar, he said.

Pulling out three strings, Professor Nash braided them, explaining that the resulting rope was stronger than any of the individual strings, but also shorter.

"That refers to the sacrifice that is necessary in order to get the strength from coming together."

Professor Nash called on blacks to form long-lasting alliances based on common interests and principles rather than the short-term coalitions that he said have left blacks vulnerable when their partners no longer needed them.

The opening ceremonies also featured the lighting of the first of seven candles and a procession of youngsters carrying the symbols of Kwanzaa, which range from crops representing the rewards of collective work to the unity cup from which every member drinks to reinforce commitment to the common struggle.

The celebration runs through Jan. 1, with a different principle stressed each day.

Today's celebration features the opening of the Traditional African-American Folk Art Exhibit at 7 p.m. in the Center for Positive Thought, 11 E. Utica St.



RONALD COLLERAN/Buffalo News

Sharing their story

Karima Amin, left, and Sharon Holley tell the story of Kwanzaa, the African-American holiday that emphasizes African origins and traditions,

to an audience Saturday at the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society. Kwanzaa will be celebrated from Dec. 26 through Jan. 1.



BILL DYVINIAK/Buffalo News

Kenneth Holley, right, and the Children of Afrika lead the audience at the Langston Hughes Center in the celebration of Kwanzaa.

Blacks Challenged to Seek Purpose At Opening of Week-long Celebration

By MICHAEL LEVY

Kwanzaa, a symbolic celebration of a people striving to link with a past, started Wednesday in the Langston Hughes Cultural Center. It began with a rousing challenge for black families and individuals, urging them to seek unity and wholeness within themselves to achieve unity of spirit and purpose within the community.

The theme at this first of seven nights was "Umoja," or unity, and N. Ahvay Orora, a Muslim preacher who also is a psychologist from Rochester, issued the challenge to a group of slightly more than 100 persons gathered in the center at 25 High St.

The Children of Afrika opened the festival with a procession and short ceremony naming the seven virtues — unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity and faith — which will be stressed each night of this celebration of black cultural heritage.

And yet, this celebration between Christmas and New Year's is unknown in Africa, according to Mr. Orora.

"This is the work of Dr. Maulenga Karenga, and it is a celebration of black unity," Mr. Orora said. "Yet we have not achieved unity; we are just starting on that road."

The seven aspects of Kwanzaa are "seven pillars — the moral minimum" we need to lead us "with tradition and reason through the wilderness of North America," he said.

The problem facing blacks in America is the same one they faced through history here — the devastation of their culture, their heritage, their history and their roots as a people, he said.

"In the 1960s we were told the problem was integration.

"Well, we can live with whites, go to school with whites, work with whites, have relationships with whites ... Our problem is not more jobs, more education or more blacks on civic boards — it is lack of knowledge of self and kind."

The history of the black in America is "the history the European has written for us. Our children come home from pre-school and know all about George Washington, and Abraham Lincoln and

that we were slaves ... They do not know about Elijah McCoy — the real McCoy — without whose lubrication principles the whole of white industry would grind to a halt..."

Before blacks can be mindful of black unity around the world, Mr. Orora said, "until we come to a profound knowledge of self and kind, liberation is unthinkable."

Stating "we are the original man, from whom all mankind comes," he urged his audience to learn where they stand in history and humanity and to seek greater self-awareness as a "precondition to unity."

That urge to seek "umoja" should be nurtured, he said, at the first stages — awareness of self and family.

"Relationships are not short-term pleasures, but long-term commitments to other people."

Today's gathering at 7 p.m. in Christ Lutheran Church, Broadway and Fox Street, will feature a "naming ceremony" where black children and adults can take African names as a personal expression of cultural unity.

BUFFALO COMMUNITY NEWS

Kwanzaa ceremony to recall victims of violent crime

Event will be a highlight of the seven-day community celebration that begins on Sunday

By CARL ALLEN
News Staff Reporter

A ceremony for the victims of violent crime and a call for others to stop using violence to settle differences will highlight this year's community celebration of Kwanzaa.

The seven-day secular observance, which begins the day after Christmas, was founded so that African-Americans could celebrate their heritage and culture, without focusing solely on the political and social struggles that have marked their history in the United States.

However, this year, with so many incidents of violent crime in the local black community, members of the Masten Block Club Coalition Action Committee see the public celebration as an opportune time to remind everyone about the consequences of violence.

"Our main focus is to bring about peace in the community, to focus on peace in the neighborhood, and stopping the violence and the shooting. What better time to do it than now, during Kwanzaa," Louise Bonner, president of the block club coalition, said.

The coalition's Action Committee is sponsoring a candlelighting ceremony for the victims of violent crime at 6 p.m. Dec. 30 around the Martin Luther King monument in the city park that bears the slain civil rights leader's name.

Don Hill, a co-chairman of the committee, said he hopes the ceremony will recognize those who have been hurt or killed and speak to others as well.

"We'll be remembering the victims of violent crime," he said. "We want the community to know we care about those people. Also we want to let people know they

don't have to resort to violence, because that's destroying all of us."

Hill said some 2,000 lights, donated by Deputy Assembly Speaker Arthur O. Eve, D-Buffero, have been strung through the fir trees behind the King monument, with the assistance of Niagara Mohawk Power Corp., and should be working by the time of the Kwanzaa observance.

Some candles will be lit during the ceremony, and Hill hopes that the lights will serve as a constant reminder during the holiday season that the community wants peace and unity.

Another highlight of this year's Kwanzaa celebration will be a lecture by the founder of the holiday Maulana Karenga, professor and head of the department of black studies at California State University at Long Beach.

The seven days of the holiday

are marked by the Nguzo Saba, or seven principles. All community Kwanzaa programs being at 7 p.m. The dates, principles and locations are:

Dec. 26, Umoja (Unity), Langston Hughes Institute, 25 High St. Opening ceremonies and speaker Brother Sala Jason Ross Brown.

Dec. 27, Kujichagulia (Self-Determination), African-American Cultural Center, 350 Masten Ave. An African Marketplace will be available, and Sister Debra Johnson will speak.

Dec. 28, Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility), Nile Valley Shule & Refuge Temple Cultural Center, 943 Jefferson Ave. The children of the Nile school will perform.

Dec. 29, Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics), Charles H. McCoy Convention Center, 653 Clinton St. near Adam Street. Karenga, the founder of Kwanzaa will speak. Adults will be asked for a donation at the door.

Dec. 30, Nia (Purpose), Loguen Memorial AME Zion Church, 1301 Genesee St. near Rohr Street. The pastor, the Rev. James Lewis, will speak.

Dec. 31, Kuumba (Creativity), Moot Senior Citizen Center, 292 High St. Open forum for speakers and entertainment. Karamu, the community feast, will follow.

Jan. 1, Imani (Faith). The Kwanzaa Committee of Buffalo, sponsors of the community celebration, urges members of the community to celebrate at home with family and friends.

New Kwanzaa stamp stirs up controversy

by Chinta Strausberg

A sticky situation is developing in the African American community over the issuance of a new stamp by the U.S. Postal Service.

While some are welcoming the ges-

"We're opposed to Karenga distorting Marcus Garvey's flag on that stamp, which is black at the top, red and green. Karenga said he changed it because Garvey was wrong about the order of the colors. Karenga feels he has the authority to change any thing he wants to without consulting us."

— Hannibal Afrik, the spokesperson for National Leadership of Elders

ture, others charge it's a blatant ripoff of Black culture.

And the post office's gaining the rights to sell Kwanzaa artifacts is robbing the African American community of a potential \$100 million market annually, one activist charges.

"The post office will make \$41.6 mil-

lion on the Kwanzaa stamp alone, to say nothing about the other artifacts," said Taish Daniels-Halali, event coordinator for the annual pro-Kwanzaa celebration at the South Shore Cultural Center.

"This will end up hurting the Kwanzaa cottage industry economy of \$100 million. If we allow these other corporations to come in and we give them access, this will hurt the small businesses who'll be able to benefit from this \$100 million market.

"I'm very disappointed at what Kwanzaa has done, especially since we've worked with Kwanzaa creator Dr. Maulana Karenga to stop the exploitation and commercialization of Kwanzaa over the past few years," Daniels-Halali said. "We even formed an organization that Karenga sanctioned called the National Coalition to Preserve the Sacredness and Integrity of Kwanzaa. Post office spokesperson Monica Hand denies trying to muscle in on the Kwanzaa market.

"There are about 5,000 businesses that display signage promoting the Kwanzaa stamp in the African American community," she said. She also denied that the post office paid Karenga funds for using the Kwanzaa stamp and other artifacts that are scheduled to be unveiled in Chicago Friday.

Reached in Los Angeles, where the stamp will make its debut Wednesday, Hand told the *Chicago Defender*, "We commissioned Cynthia St. James, a noted African American artist, to design the stamp."

Hand said it portrays a Black family, a straw mat, a (kinara) candle-holder, a

unity cup and a red, black and green flag.

"We authenticated the design by showing it to Dr. Karenga to make sure whatever we used in the stamp is authentic.

"We didn't buy rights from Dr. Karenga. It is our design. We commissioned an artist to create this design. We authenticated the elements that are used in his design.

Hand said the post office will also be selling four designs of a Kwanzaa greeting card and a small 6x7 frame enlargement of the stamp design.

But the post office's troubles over the stamp may just be beginning.

A boycott of the stamp was launched Monday by the National Leadership of Elders (NLE), who also voiced outrage at Karenga for giving the postal service the green light to sell the stamps.

Hannibal Afrik, the spokesperson for the NLE, which is composed of nine groups nationwide, admitted he's dumbfounded at Karenga.

He said he's also shocked and angry that the flag on the stamp is incorrect.

"We're opposed to Karenga distorting Marcus Garvey's flag on that stamp, which is black at the top, red and green. Karenga said he changed it because Garvey was wrong about the order of the colors. Karenga feels he has the authority to change any thing he wants to without consulting us," Afrik said. However, Hand said "The flag is consistent with the Kwanzaa flag and that's part of the authentication of Dr. Karenga that the objects that are used in Kwanzaa observance are used accurately."

On the call for a boycott of the stamp, Hand said, "We're sorry that they feel this way, but the postal service is issuing the Kwanzaa stamp in commemoration of Kwanzaa." Hand said there are several small Black firms that have licenses to use the stamp on their products.

Calling for a meeting with Karenga, Afrik said, "We're seeking reconciliation and a firm explanation of what and why he did this and how it relates to the values of Kwanzaa. The community deserves an explanation, but if he refuses to meet with us, we'll determine what'll be the next step.

"The elders are insulted at what he has done because the selling of the Kwanzaa stamp is the exact opposite of what we've been teaching about this spiritual celebration for the last 30 years," Afrik said.

"For the last three decades, we've been involved in Kwanzaa and have always maintain a sacred observance of this spiritual and family community event. We've resisted any efforts to commercialize or economically exploit this sacred celebration," he said.

"We're encouraging the community to not purchase or sell Kwanzaa stamps or to buy the post office's prepared phone card, books, greeting cards and other Kwanzaa items. We're asking Blacks not to decorate this spiritual holiday."

Afrik added that his group is circulating petitions opposing the selling of the Kwanzaa stamp.

"We're documenting the community's opposition," he said.

Karenga did not return repeated *Defender* calls.