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Out of the Attic

Kwanzaa: Celebrating cultural identity and principles

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“Harambee!” Let’s pull together! As friends and family, let’s celebrate our unity and collaboration to work for the common good and betterment of our surrounding world. This sentiment embodies the spirit of Kwanzaa. Celebrated from Dec. 26 to Jan. 1, Kwanzaa is a Pan-African holiday that commemorates family, community and culture through core principles, song, dance, storytelling, poetry, reading, African drumming and feasting.

Such a celebration is especially important for Black/African American people within the United States due to the complex American history related to race relations. Established in 1966, amidst the Black Freedom Movement, the celebration of Kwanzaa aimed to reaffirm and celebrate cultural identity, emphasizing the Nguzo Saba or the Seven Principles, which are a set of ideals created by author and scholar-activist, Dr. Maulana Karenga, who stresses the indispensable need to preserve, continually revitalize and promote Black/African American culture. Karenga – professor and chair of Africana studies at California State, in Long Beach – established Kwanzaa following extensive research on African harvest celebrations and other aspects of the Ashanti and Zulu.

In fact, Karenga’s choice in naming the celebration was influenced by the Swahili phrase, “Matunda ya kwanza,” meaning “first fruits” or harvest. Thus, namesaked after a phrase with origins in the first harvest celebrations of Africa. This embodies the core premise of the establishment of Kwanzaa: to reaffirm and reestablish Black/ African American ties to African culture and bonds between Black/African Americans and other African people across the diaspora. Most importantly, the following seven principles are at the heart of such celebrations:

- Umoja (unity): To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation and race.
- Kujichagulia (self-determination): To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves.
- Ujima (collective work and responsibility): To build and maintain our community together and make our brothers’ and sisters’ problems our problems and to solve them together.
- Ujamaa (cooperative economics): To build and maintain our own stores, shops and other businesses and to profit from them together.
- Nia (purpose): To make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.
- Kuumba (creativity): To always do as much as we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited.



The Alexandria Black History Museum will hold its annual Kwanzaa m will hold its annual Kwanza workshop on Saturday at 2:15 p.m. Photo/dailystor.org



Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

• Imani (faith): To believe with all our heart in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.

To honor this legacy and to support Kwanzaa celebrations, the Alexandria Black History Museum will host its annual Kwanzaa Workshop Dec. 10, 2022, at 2:15 p.m. at Charles E. Beatley, Jr. Central Library located at 5005 Duke St. It is a family friendly, interactive workshop covering the history and principles of the holiday. It will also include activities and decorating ideas to aid in planning your own Kwanzaa celebration.

Reservations are suggested. For tickets, go to <http://alexlibraryva.org/event/7583964>. You can also join us early at 11 a.m. for the Tales for Young Historians, ages 5-8, event at the same location. More information can be found at <https://alexlibraryva.org/event/7584685>.

“Out of the Attic” is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as “Marking Time” and explored Alexandria’s history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into “Out of the Attic” and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.

These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria and invited guests.