

Cultural News

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Celebrating KWANZAA!

KWANZAA, the African-American cultural holiday conceived and developed by Dr. Maulana Ron Karenga, was first celebrated on December 26, 1966. Kwanzaa is traditionally celebrated from December 26 through January 1, with each day focused on Nguzo Saba, or the seven principles. Derived from the Swahili phrase "matunda ya kwanza" which means "first fruits", Kwanzaa is rooted in the first harvest celebrations practiced in various cultures in Africa. Kwanzaa seeks to enforce a connectedness to African cultural identity, provide a focal point for the gathering of African peoples, and to reflect upon the Nguzo Saba, or the seven principles, that have sustained Africans. Africans and African-Americans of all religious faiths and backgrounds practice Kwanzaa. Kwanzaa was born out of the whirlwind of social and political changes of the sixties decade. The sixties represent one of many eras during which the African and African-American struggle for freedom and self-identity reached its historical peak, spawning multiple revolutionary movements.

By creating Kwanzaa, African-Americans sought to rectify the cultural and economic exploitation perpetrated against us during the months of October, November, and December (the Christmas season). During this season, corporate America typically ignored the quality of life concerns of African-Americans, yet encouraged participation in the commercialism of Christmas. Additionally, African-Americans did not observe a holiday that was specific to our needs. A review of the major holidays celebrated in the United States would reveal that not one related specifically to the growth and development of African-Americans. The development of Kwanzaa assumed a reassessment, reclaiming, recommitment, remembrance, retrieval, resumption, resurrection, and rejuvenation of the "Way of Life" principles recognized by African-Americans. These principles have strengthened African-Americans during our worldwide sojourn.

Today, Kwanzaa is recognized by millions throughout America and the world. It is celebrated often in community settings provided by homes, churches, mosques, temples, community centers, schools, and places of work. Kwanzaa allows us to celebrate the season without shame or fear of embracing our history, our culture, and ourselves.

The Primary Symbols of Kwanzaa

MKEKA (M-kay-cah) - The Mkeka is a straw mat on which all the other items are placed. It is a traditional item and therefore symbolizes tradition as the foundation on which everything else rests.

KINARA (Kee-nah-rah) - The Kinara is a candleholder that holds seven candles, and represents the original stalk from which all life sprang forth. It is traditionally said that the First-Born is like a stalk of corn that produces corn, which in turn becomes stalk, reproducing itself later in the same manner so that there is no end.

MSHUMAA (Mee-shoo-maah) - The seven candles represent the Seven Principles (Nguzo Saba) upon which the First-Born established society, in a way that people would benefit the most from it. They are Umoja (Unity); Kujichagulia (Self-Determination); Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility); Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics); Nia (Purpose); Kuumba (Creativity), and Imani (Faith).

MUHINDI (Moo-heen-dee) - The ear of corn represents the offspring or product (the children) of the stalk (the father of the house). It signifies the ability or potential of the offspring, themselves, to become stalks (parents), and thus produce their own offspring -- a process which goes on indefinitely, and insures the immortality of the Nation. To illustrate this, each household uses as many ears of corn as there are children in the family. Every house has at least one ear of corn; for there is always the potential even if it has not yet been realized.

KIKOMBE CHA UMOJA (Kee-coam-bay chah-oo-moe-jah) - The Unity Cup symbolizes the first principle of Kwanzaa. It is used to pour the libation for the ancestors; and each member of the immediate family or extended family drinks from it in a gesture of honor, praise, collective work and commitment to continue the path initiated by the ancestors.

ZAWADI (Sah-wah-dee) - The presents (gifts) represent 1) the fruits of the labor of the parents, and 2) the rewards of the seeds sown by the children. Parents must commit their children to goodness, as well as to good acts, good thoughts, good grades, etc., for the coming year and reward them according to how well they live up to their commitments. Goodness is that which promises happiness to the family and community; for all acts, thoughts and values are invalid if they do not in some way benefit the community.

KARAMU - The feast symbolizes the high festive celebration that brings the community together to exchange and to give thanks to the Creator for its accomplishments during the year. It is held on the night of December 31 and includes food, drink, music, dance, conversation, laughter and ceremony when greeting others.



DECEMBER 2016 CALENDAR

AIDS AWARENESS MONTH
UNIVERSAL HUMAN RIGHTS MONTH
SAFE TOYS AND GIFTS MONTH

- 1- Rosa Parks Day (US)
- 2- Special Education Day (US)
- 6- St. Nicholas Day (International)
- 7- National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day
- 10- Jane Addams Day (US)
- 11- Mawlid an Nabi (Muslim)
- 14-28- Halcyon Days (Greek)
- 15- Bill of Rights Day (US)
- 21- Winter Solstice - Yule (Pagan)
- 24- Christmas Eve (International)
- 25-01- Hanukkah (Jewish)
- 26-01- Kwanzaa (International)
- 28- Bodhi Day (Buddhism)
- 31- New Years Eve (International)



First Day of Chanukah/Hanukkah

Many Jewish communities in the United States observe the first day of Hanukkah, which marks the start of Hanukkah, also known as Chanukah or Festival of Lights. Hanukkah is an eight-day Jewish observance that remembers the Jewish people's struggle for religious freedom.

Celebrate Hanukkah

Jewish communities in the United States celebrate the first day of Hanukkah on the 25th day of the month of Kislev in the Jewish calendar. The Hanukkah period lasts

for eight days and is celebrated from the 25th day of Kislev to the second day of Tevet. The first night of Hanukkah (or Chanukah) starts with special blessings at sunset the day before the 25th of Kislev. Many Jewish people light the menorah, also known as the hanukiah (or chanukkiyah), which is a type of candelabrum.

Many Americans of Jewish faith also eat food fried in olive oil, such as potato cakes, and different fried breads. Hanukkah dishes include sufganiot (Hanukkah donuts), potato latkes (pancakes), mandelbrot (this

can be sliced like a hard bread), and rugelach (pastry that with different fillings). The first day of Hanukkah is the start of a celebratory period in which a four-sided toy called dreidel is used for games. The first night of Hanukkah is also a night when people sing traditional songs to celebrate Hanukkah. Gift-giving is also popular at this time of the year.

Public Life

The first day of Hanukkah is not a federal public holiday in the United States. Some Jewish schools have their school vacation fall around the same time of Hanukkah. Chanukah/Hanukkah (first day) is observed on Wednesday Dec 17 2014 of this year.

About Hanukkah

Hanukkah commemorates the Jewish people's successful rebellion against the Greeks in the Maccabean War in 162 BCE. A ritual cleansing and re-dedication of the Temple occurred after the Jewish people's victory. It is believed that there was only enough consecrated oil to keep the lamp burning for one day but the small bottle of oil miraculously lasted for eight days. Hanukkah, also known as Chanukah, is referred as the Feast of Lights or Festival of Lights for this reason.

Moreover, the survival of Judaism over the many years is also celebrated during this period. The last day of Hanukkah, which marks the end of Hanukkah, falls on the eighth day of this period.

<https://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/us/chanukah>

New Staff Interpreter Profile: Consuelo Alarcon

Consuelo was born and raised in the suburbs of Lima, Peru. She always had a passion to learn foreign languages and cultures. She also enjoys helping people in need.

She graduated from Ricardo Palma University in Lima with a Bachelor's degree in Translation and Interpretation in English and French. She went on to work for different organizations, translating articles in topics such as medicine and technology. At the same time, she also worked as a Long Distance Operator at Telefonica del Peru.

Consuelo moved to California about thirteen years ago, residing in the Bay Area. She later earned an AS Degree from the College of San Mateo and started working as a Medical Assistant and an Orthodontic Assistant. It was in these last jobs that she started interpreting for LEP patients.

Even though her past experiences were related to written translation, she also had some exposure to in-person interpreting. She decided to pursue her career further, by taking Interpreting courses at the UCSF Interpreting Extension Program and online courses at MITS to become exclusively a Medical Interpreter.

Through this career choice, she felt as if she was fulfilling her original desire of expanding her knowledge in English and serving people in need with the purpose to bridge the gap in communication. She said, she had finally connected the missing dots in her professional life.

In her spare time, Consuelo likes to spend some time outdoors with her family, watch movies with a bag of popcorn by her side, do some weight lifting to try to stay fit and indulge in dark chocolate when she craves something sweet.

According to Consuelo, It has been a blessing to become a part of the Medical Interpreting Services (MIS) team at the UC Davis Health System. In her own words, "Interpreting is a constant learning experience. We can make a difference in the lives of so many people. It is a unique kind of job where I don't know where I am going to be the next day. I'm really enjoying it".

Welcome aboard, Consuelo. We are pleased to have you as part of the team.

