PART I. OF ALL THE RICH, INSTRUCTIVE, UPLIFTING and expansive ways to express the central meaning and message of Kwanzaa, none is more vital or valuable than our seeing and embracing it as a season and celebration of creating and sharing good in the world. Even Kwanzaa’s most essential definition as a celebration of family, community and culture, is a celebration of the shared good in and of family, community and culture, and ultimately what all this means for the good of the world. This derives from a righteous reading and emulation of the ancient African model and practice of cultivating, harvesting, and sharing the first fruit of field and forest, i.e., life-sustaining good in the world. It is an ancient model rooted in cooperative agricultural practices which taught us the enduring value of our sowing seeds of goodness everywhere, of cultivating them with loving care, and harvesting and sharing the products in community binding and building ways.

An African American and pan-African holiday, Kwanzaa is, in both conception and practice, a world-encompassing celebration. It is world-encompassing in that it is practiced by millions of Africans throughout the global African community. And it is world-encompassing in its roots in ancient African agricultural celebrations and their concern with the earth and their conception of humans interrelated with the world and their responsibility to it.

Although people tend to believe that Kwanzaa is essentially a modern holiday founded in 1966 by this author, actually it has two origins: ancient and modern. In its origins in agriculture celebrations, Kwanzaa is as old as agriculture itself and the celebrations of the first fruits. Indeed, it can be said that Kwanzaa is older than agriculture, that is to say, older than large-scale planned and organized farming. For Kwanzaa, as a first fruit celebration, is rooted in the natural cycle of the season when the first fruits of tree, bush, plant and vine appeared and were harvested by our people; and our people gathered together to celebrate the good harvest, to give thanks for the good earth and the abundant blessings from it, and to recommit themselves to protect, preserve and care for the earth in life-affirming and world-respecting ways.

Kwanzaa also has modern origins rooted in the Black Freedom Movement of the 1960’s. It is part of the liberation struggle to free ourselves and be ourselves. Thus, it is an act of freedom, of self-determination, for it was created and declared without input or permission of the dominant society. Moreover, it was a defiant act to celebrate our African selves, our families, community and culture in dignity-affirming, life-enhancing and liberating ways. It was also a liberating act of sankofa, cultural recovery and remembrance of ancient visions and values directed toward grounding and enriching our lives and advancing the interests of our liberation struggle. For again, as always, it was a central part of our people’s struggle to be ourselves and free ourselves culturally as well as politically.

Thus, Kwanzaa, standing in the midst of a dynamic and ever-pressing present, looks back while facing forward to ground and orient ourselves, measure our thoughts and practices of today by the best of our past thought and practice and develop the most ethical, effective and expansive ways for moving forward. And in today’s world with such packaged and peddled fear and confusion, structural poverty, severe suffering and oppressions of all kinds which violate the dignity and rights of human beings and the integrity of the earth, a solid cultural and moral ground on which to stand is imperative. Thus, our world, in both the natural and social sense, while not irrevocably broken, is severely damaged and in need of an ongoing repair, renewal and remaking in the most ethically sensitive, profound and promising ways.

The Kwanzaa theme for 2017 (6257) “Practicing the Principles of Kwanzaa: Repairing, Renewing and Remaking Our World”, foregrounds and focuses on the ancient African ethical imperative of serudj ta, which means to repair, renew and remake our world, making it more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it. The concept serudj
Indeed, our ancestors, the Seven Principles: 

1. **Umoja** (Unity)
2. **Kujichagulia** (Self-Determination)
3. **Ujima** (Collective Work and Responsibility)
4. **Ujamaa** (Cooperative Economics)
5. **Nia** (Purpose)
6. **Kuumba** (Creativity)
7. **Imani** (Faith)

Dr. Maulana Karenga, Professor and Chair of Africana Studies, California State University-Long Beach; Executive Director, African American Cultural Center (Us); Creator of Kwanzaa; and author of Kwanzaa: A Celebration of Family, Community and Culture and Essays on Struggle: Position and Analysis, www.AfricanAmericanCulturalCenter-LA.org; www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org; www.MaulanaKarenga.org.
P ART II. CONCEIVED AND FORGED IN THE FIRES—

and furnace of the Black Freedom struggle of

the 1960’s and rooted in a radical history of re-

stance, and community building, development and

maintenance, the Nguzo Saba offer a value system

and language which reflect and reaffirm this history

and culture of struggle. Thus, the Nguzo Saba expla-

nations for each principle give us a language of

work, service, commitment, institution-building and

righteous and relentless struggle. These principles

call us to a committed and sustained practice of:

striving and maintaining; defining, naming and cre-

ating; building; active caring and problem-solving;

sharing responsibility and benefit; developing; and

demonstrating an active faith in the righteousness

and victory of our struggle.

The principle and practice of Umoja, unity,

commits us to strive for and maintain a harmonious

togetherness in life, love, work and struggle. It seeks

and sustains a togetherness that is principled, pur-

poseful, peaceful and productive. It is about coming

together to reinforce the bonds between us, to con-

tinue to build new ones and to increase our capacity
to do our work, wage our struggle and achieve and

enjoy good in the world. It teaches the oneness and

sacredness of life and the interrelatedness and inter-
dependence of humanity and of humanity and the

world. And it expands our arc of ethical concern and

human sensitivity to the suffering, needs, aspira-
tions, and struggles of others, calling on us to stand in
active solidarity with other peoples and struggles for
the expansion of human freedom, flourishing and
good in the world.

Kujichagulia (self-determination) advances the
fundamental principle of the right and responsibility
of our people and all peoples to determine their own
destiny and daily lives in dignity and freedom, prac-
tice their own culture, control and benefit from their

own human and natural resources, pursue their aspira-
tions and interests with due respect for the interests of

others and the well-being of the world, and rise in

righteous resistance to those who would deny them.

Also, Kujichagulia calls on us to define ourselves by

the good we do, and the dignity affirming ways we

walk and do our work in the world; to name our-

selves in ways that reflect rootedness in our history

and culture; to create for ourselves in ways that af-

firm and advance life and contribute to human flour-

ishing and the well-being of the world; and to speak

for ourselves as self-conscious contributors to criti-
cal conversations addressing the fundamental issues
confronting African people and humankind.

Ujima (collective work and responsibility), as

a principle and practice also, reminds us and reaffirms
that we must indeed build the just, good and sus-

tainable world we want and deserve, and that it is

a cooperative project, a shared responsibility to
bring, increase and sustain good in the world as Odu
Ifa teaches. It teaches us “to make our brothers’ and
sisters’ problems our problems and to solve them
together” so that their cause becomes our cause and

together we do the work and wage the struggles nec-

essary to end domination, deprivation and degrada-
tion in their various forms in this society and

throughout the world. For the battlefields for free-
dom, justice and good in the world are everywhere

there is unfreedom, injustice and evil. Thus, we must

stand in active solidarity with the oppressed, en-

slaved, brutalized and suffering peoples of the

world, including the enslaved and abused Africans in
Libya, the Middle East, Europe and everywhere; the

peoples of occupied Haiti and Palestine; the peoples

of Puerto Rico and Yemen; and the Aboriginals of

Australia and the Rohingya of Myanmar. This

means resisting and removing oppressions of race,
class, gender, sexuality, religion, age, ability, na-

tionality and other constraints imposed on human life,
human freedom and human flourishing everywhere.

And, of course, it means again imagining a new

world and new future and building and struggling for

them together.

Ujamaa (cooperative economics) is the princi-
ple and practice of shared work and shared wealth
central to the ethics of the community harvest. Uja-
maa means familyhood and speaks to how we

should do economics as familiars who care about
each other’s well-being and the well-being of the world. *Ujamaa* upholds the rights and dignity of workers and the rights of all people to the good and wealth of the world and to be free from plunder by predatory corporations and countries. It rejects crass consumerism, vulgar individualism and market driven practices which pose plunder as progress, destruction of the earth as development, and ecocide as the salvation of the human species. It means imagining and putting in place economic cooperative structures that bring people together to increase capacity, satisfy needs, and learn and live life-enhancing values which can be transferred to other areas of life.

*Nia* (purpose) teaches us to develop a collective vocation as a people which has as its core aim and end the restoration of our people to their traditional greatness. Now, our ancestors taught that greatness is above all a moral conception and achievement in practice. Indeed, they remind us that greatness is not determined by the size of the buildings we build, the discoveries we make, the innovations we achieve or even the knowledge we acquire. Rather, it is how we use these capacities in the service of ourselves and others and for the well-being of the world. Speaking to the issue, they say in the *Husia* “the wise are known by their wisdom, but the great are known by their good deeds”. It is, thus, in doing good in and for the world that greatness is achieved and it is service to others and the world that opens the way to greatness as all the great women and men in our history have taught us and demonstrated in righteous deeds.

*Kuumba* (creativity) is the principle and practice of doing “all we can in the way we can in order to leave our community (and by extension the world) more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it”. It is to reach inside ourselves and constantly bring forth the best of what it means to be African and human in the world and to open new ways to understand and assert ourselves in life-enhancing, world-preserving and good-advancing ways. Here we are to create and recreate the world i.e., to repair, renew and remake it. We are to be placemakers and way-makers who through creative imagination and transformative action open spaces and ways for others which point toward a new history and future of humankind in harmony with the world.

The principle and practice of *Imani* (faith) begins with belief in the Good, the good of our people, our lives, our struggle and the world. It is also an active belief in our people’s right to the shared good of the world without denying or diminishing the right of others. Moreover, it calls for belief in our capacity to transform ourselves, society and the world and with other oppressed, struggling and progressive people bring into being a new history and hope for humankind. And finally, *Imani* requires faith in “the righteousness and victory of our struggle”. As Seba Malcolm said, our cause is just, our reasoning morally right and our desire and demand for freedom, justice and equity are compelling and uncompromisable.

**IF WE ARE TRULY TO ACCEPT AND ASSUME THIS awesome task of radically transforming the world, we must see ourselves in world-encompassing ways as injured physicians who have the capacity, both present and potential, to heal, repair, renew and remake ourselves in the process and practice of repairing, renewing and remaking the world. And this means, at a minimum, transforming it into an ever-expanding realm of human freedom, justice and flourishing in the context of the assured well-being of the world.**

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