

KWANZAA HISTORY OUTLINED

by Wautella ibn Yusuf

Author's note

This is a brief outline of the birth and maturation of the African American holiday Kwanzaa in two parts: 1. **Kwanzaa History Summary** (Kwanzaa development and spread in popularity), and 2. **Kwanzaa History Table** (a chart listing practitioners and promoters by year, organization, leaders, and location). This information is summarized from my research notes, conversations with elder Kwanzaa practitioners, and personal interpretation. It is not a detailed history of Kwanzaa and does not claim to be. I apologize in advance for any errors or omissions. Please help improve the outline by providing feedback on missing data or corrections.

Much honor and appreciation must be given to Dr. Maulana Karenga for consciously creating Kwanzaa as a practice of liberation and cultural enrichment. After creating Kwanzaa, he has been foremost in promoting and developing its practice through annual national and international Kwanzaa lectures and workshops; plus his innumerable Kwanzaa articles and interviews. In 1996 Dr. Karenga published the definitive text for the holiday practice and interpretation: "Kwanzaa: A Celebration of Family, Community and Culture"

Furthermore, we wish to acknowledge and praise the many pioneering Kwanzaa builders, individuals and groups that made great sacrifices to establish the international holiday.

Kwanzaa History Summary

Kwanzaa Founder/Creator: Dr. Maulana Karenga - 1966

1st Period: 1966 in Los Angeles Dr. Maulana Karenga, serving as Chair of his organization Us, created Kwanzaa. Using his Black liberation philosophy Kawaida as a guide, he drew from various African cultural practices to formulate Kwanzaa. Kwanzaa was first established and practiced in his organization Us.

Kwanzaa Pioneers: 1967 - 1977

2nd Period: From Us organization, Kwanzaa spread to other individuals and organizations using or borrowing from Kawaida philosophy across America. They were primarily Black revolutionary

cultural nationalists in major cities, e.g. New York, Chicago, Washington, DC, San Diego, Philadelphia, Newark, Detroit and New Orleans. These early groups and individuals would most likely be members of the African Theater and Art Movement, Black Student Unions (BSU), Independent African School Movement, Black Economic Development Movement and local Kwanzaa committees. Kwanzaa, with its seven principles value system (Nguzo Saba), was a natural fit for their new Black or African world view, e.g. Congress of African People (CAP), Black Power Conferences. Aside from the Black cultural nationalists and Pan-Africanists, there were other important contributors, such as Black churches, Black media, and Black public schools.

Kwanzaa Builders: 1978 - 1987

3rd Period: Some of the older pioneers' groups were replaced by newer and younger groups or some cases members from older groups formed new Kwanzaa support programs. During the early 80's a new Black consciousness movement returned, some called it "Back To Black Movement," creating a renewed interest in Black history and culture, e.g. Black films, Black bookstores, music (conscious rap), dreadlocks, natural hair, African dance, African spirituality and Kwanzaa.

Kwanzaa Mainstream: 1988-1999 (+ forward)

4th Period: Kwanzaa practice increases with the mainstream diversity and inclusion movement, Kwanzaa postage stamp and Kwanzaa mainstream media coverage. Kwanzaa is acknowledged and practiced in mainstream America for the first time, e.g. annual White House press release; presented in public spaces with Christmas and Hanukkah.