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# Kwanzaa celebrates cultural identity

“*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 December 26 to January 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 Blacks in the United States due to the complex American history related to race relations. Established in 1966, amid the Black Freedom Movement, the celebration of Kwanzaa aimed to reaffirm and celebrate cultural identity, emphasizing the Nguzo Saba or the Seven Principles.

These ideals were created by author and scholar-activist, Maulana Karenga, Ph.D.,

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 re-establish the ties of Black Americans to African culture and to African people across the diaspora.

Most importantly, the following seven principles are at the heart of such celebrations:

- *Umoja*, or 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.

- *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 December 9 from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The museum is located at 902 Wythe St. It is a family friendly, interactive workshop covering the history and principles of the holiday.

The event will start with a story for younger children and then will progress to stories and activities for older children. It will also include activities and decorating ideas to aid in planning your own Kwanzaa celebration. Reservations are suggested. For tickets, go to alexandriava.gov/shop.

*Out of the Attic is provided by the Office of Historic Alexandria.*