



AMERICAN COMMEMORATIVES

KWANZAA

Many ancient African cultures held festivals when the first crops were harvested each year. Although a relatively young holiday, Kwanzaa is rooted in these ancient festivals. In fact, the holiday's name is taken from the Swahili phrase *matunda ya kwanza*, which means "first fruits."

During an era of civil rights struggles, African American scholar and activist Maulana Karenga felt there was a need for a holiday that would celebrate African American unity and pride and help African Americans remember their African heritage. In 1966, he developed Kwanzaa, a festival that would extend for seven days; from Christmas to New Year's Day.

The five fundamental activities of Kwanzaa were also shared by African first-fruit celebrations: gathering together with friends, family members, and other community members; honoring the creator and creation; remembering the past; committing to important ideals for the community; and celebrating all that is good in life, from successes to struggles. Alongside these five fundamental activities are Kwanzaa's seven core principles: *umoja* (unity), *kujichagulia* (self-determination), *ujima* (collective work and responsibility), *ujamaa* (cooperative economics), *nia* (purpose), *kuumba* (creativity), and *imani* (faith). Each day is devoted to one of the principles.

On each night of the holiday, family members light one of a set of candles known as *mishumaa saba*. There are three red candles, three green candles, and one black candle, and they are placed in a candleholder called a *kinara*. After the candle lighting, family members drink from a *kikombe cha umoja* (unity cup) and toast their ancestors.

On the final night of Kwanzaa, December 31, a great feast is held. This *karumu*, as it is known, is held at a table that holds seven symbolic items: the *mishumaa saba* (seven candles), the *kinara* (candleholder), *mkeka* (a straw mat), *mazao* (fruit), *muhindi* (an ear of corn for each child), *zawadi* (gifts), and the *kikombe cha umoja* (the unity cup). The gifts are given on January 1.

This stamp was illustrated by Synthia Saint James and issued on October 21, 2001, in New York, New York.



NGUZO SABA

Umoja

Kujichagulia

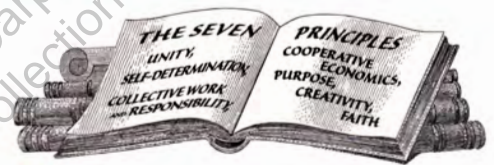
Ujima

Ujamaa

Nia

Kuumba

Imani





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Issue Date: October 21, 2001

First Day City: New York, New York

Designer: Synthia Saint James,
Los Angeles, California

Engraver: Southern Graphic Systems, Inc.

Art Director: Derry Noyes, Washington, D.C.

Typographer: Derry Noyes

Modeler: Avery Dennison (SPD)

Printer: Avery Dennison (AVR)

Manufacturing Process: Gravure

Colors: Magenta, yellow, cyan, black

Image Area: 1.050 x 0.770 inches or
26.67 x 19.56 millimeters

Format: Pane of 20 (1 design)

Plate Numbers: "V" followed by four (4) single digits

Marginal Markings: © USPS 1996, price, plate position
diagram, plate numbers, barcode

Kwanzaa

During the seven days between Christmas and the New Year, while others are busy returning gifts and buying champagne for New Year's Eve, many African Americans are contemplating important concepts like family unity and self-determination. They are celebrating Kwanzaa, a holiday based on traditional African harvest festivals.

In 1966, pan-African studies professor and black cultural leader Maulana Karenga developed Kwanzaa. He used the Swahili word for "first fruits" to name his new holiday, and he listed seven principles he believed were important to African American culture: umoja (unity), kujichagulia (self-determination), ujima (collective work and responsibility), ujamaa (cooperative economics), nia (purpose), kuumba (creativity), and imani (faith). Each day of Kwanzaa is associated with one of these principles.

Family members spend each night of the holiday together. They light a candle called a *mishumaa* in a candelabrum called a *kinara* and discuss the day's principle. By the seventh night, they will have lit seven candles: three red, three green, and one black. The seventh night, December 31, is a time for a large, happy feast called a *karumu*. The holiday table holds symbolic items: the kinara, the mishumaa, a straw placemat, some fruit, an ear of corn for each child, a unity cup, and small gifts.



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KWANZAA



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