



AMERICAN COMMEMORATIVES



KWANZAA

In this 32-cent stamp, a family celebrates Kwanzaa, a non-religious holiday celebrated by African Americans and others worldwide from December 26 to January 1. In 1966, African-American studies professor and civil rights activist

Dr. Maulana Karenga founded the holiday to encourage unity and joy among African Americans and reinforce principles important to the community. Since then, millions of people have embraced the spirit and observances of Kwanzaa.

Karenga named the holiday after the Swahili phrase "matuna ya kwanza," which means "first fruits." Traditionally, Africans have celebrated the first harvest of the year.

Synthia Saint James of Los Angeles, California, designed this stamp. A self-taught artist, Saint James has written two children's books, including *The Gifts of Kwanzaa*. She has created more than 35 book covers and 80 greeting cards, including some for UNICEF.

Into this stamp Saint James incorporated the seven symbols of Kwanzaa:

a straw placemat; a candleholder; three red, three green, and one black candle; fruit; corn; gifts; and a communal unity cap. The flag that appears has the same symbolic colors as the candles: black signifies the people of African descent, red signifies their bloodshed, and green signifies their hope for prosperity.

With these symbols, Kwanzaa observers consider the "Nguzo Saba," the seven principles of the holiday: unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith. Each day is devoted to one principle. In the evening, families come together to light a candle and discuss the day's principle.

On December 31, the celebration of the good, or "karamu," takes place. Participants enjoy African-influenced food, music, and dance and wear African-inspired clothing. They also honor their ancestors with ceremonies, assess the passing year, and make commitments for the coming year.

This stamp will be issued in Los Angeles, California on October 22, 1997.

