

Kwanzaa: The Making of a Black Nationalist Tradition, 1966–1990

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A SEVEN-DAY FESTIVAL beginning on December 26th, Kwanzaa, created in 1966, is one of the most lasting innovations of United States black nationalism of the 1960s.¹ Becoming more popular in Canada, the Caribbean, and elsewhere, Kwanzaa is still chiefly celebrated in the United States. Designed to resemble the ritual at an African harvest festival, Kwanzaa consists of a number of activities, from feasting and lighting candles to recitations and the giving of small gifts to children. A marketing survey in 1997 estimated that Kwanzaa is celebrated by one out of seven United States blacks.² Two successive acts of national imprimatur demonstrate the growing acceptance of Kwanzaa. The Postal Service offered a Kwanzaa stamp for sale in 1997. The same year President Clinton became the first United States president to issue a proclamation sending good wishes to Americans who celebrate Kwanzaa. Kwanzaa is significant both because of its popularity and because it retells the African American story, with the distant African rural past elevated to the point of origin. It is even more significant as a cultural event where African American racial identity is formed and refashioned in the post-civil rights era.

As a flexible ritual that changed, grew, and flourished over the years, the history of Kwanzaa is replete with ironies. Born in part out of a critique of capitalism in the United States, the holiday owed much of its growing acceptance to refurbishing through consumerism. Originating among a black nationalist scornful of black “matriarchy,” Kwanzaa found its most eager enthusiasts among black women, who usually organized the feast in the home. Seen as an accessible ritual bound to appeal to the black masses, Kwanzaa was taken up mainly by the black middle class. A ceremony intended to replicate a simple harvest festival, most Kwanzaa celebrations occurred among residents of large cities or suburbs. Created by an intellectual hostile to Christianity, Kwanzaa proved dynamic enough to be redefined as religious, secular, or both, and as fully compatible with Christianity. Stemming from a rejection of racial integration, the holiday-time Kwanzaa celebration at many public schools func-

tioned as a sign of toleration for cultural difference. Seen as a ritual to develop a diasporic African identity, Kwanzaa became more appealing as it came to include many more elements of African American history and culture. The theme of this essay is this ironic transformation in the meaning, practice, and discourse of Kwanzaa between its founding in 1966 and an artificial end point, 1990. Like all rituals, Kwanzaa is both a reflection of changing discourses as well as ritual that helps to shape them.

The typical way of explaining the popularity of a nationalist ritual is to begin by classifying it, as an "invented tradition," using Eric Hobsbawm's phrase. Hobsbawm defined an invented tradition as a custom of relatively recent origin deliberately designed to resemble an ancient tradition. Hobsbawm found that many invented traditions, from kilt-wearing to Bastille Day, were inspired by various forms of nationalism.³ These rituals were intended to celebrate a glorious national past. Hobsbawm thought the late nineteenth century a stretch of time particularly significant in the development of nationalist ritual because many European countries and the United States confronted the difficulty of forging bonds of national loyalty among large, often urban immigrant populations. In the United States newcomers and the native-born lower classes were made into patriots by pledging allegiance to the flag and celebrating Thanksgiving and Christmas in school pageants and at home.⁴

The ability of a small group of adherents to invent new myths and traditions is one sign of the strength of nationalism. Yet not all the rituals nationalists propose succeed. A sure indication of success is the public's willingness to regard the new ritual as authentic. There are thus similarities between Gilded Age United States and European nationalist rituals and Kwanzaa. Nonetheless, the differences are more striking than the similarities. Kwanzaa was not merely a new nationalist ritual but an alternative to the dominant one of the season. Black nationalists were United States citizens assigning their national identity a far lower priority than their racial identity. In fact, they were hostile to the country of their birth and patriotic display, decidedly opposed to serving in the Vietnam War, and critical of the nation's values and institutions. Black nationalists did not control the government or seek to secure the allegiance of the masses to the government. Instead, they were radicals, engaged in frequent armed confrontations with the police and shootouts with other black nationalist groups. Kwanzaa became widely adopted in schools and homes only when it shed its oppositional character and came to be redefined as a more familial event. It was especially appeal-

ing to the black middle class—and the main holiday makers, black women—who were seeking a child-oriented, highly sentimental Christmastime holiday as well as one of racial self-definition.

By the 1990s Kwanzaa had become established enough to inspire critique from black intellectuals writing in mainstream journals and in black magazines. Anna Wilde, a journalist, whose article appeared in the *Public Interest* in 1995, and Gerald Early, a professor of African American literature at Washington University in a *Harper's* article in 1997 have offered assessments of the festival. Both articles combine sociological analysis and a bit of contemporary history with largely negative views of Kwanzaa. Anna Wilde, who described celebrations in the Roxbury section of Boston and in Cambridge, Massachusetts, briefly traced the commercialization of the holiday through expositions of consumer goods, adoption in the public schools, museums, and at black churches. To Wilde Kwanzaa helped to develop black middle-class racial identity but was marred by antagonism toward whites. She noted the exclusion of whites—even a white mother of an interracial child—from some Kwanzaa celebrations. Wilde concluded that “Kwanzaa is essentially an effort on the part of African Americans to create community cohesiveness, though still unfortunately coupled in some ways with anti-white feeling.”⁵

Early offered a second negative appraisal in *Harper's* in 1997 as he pondered his own ambivalence about attending student-initiated Kwanzaa celebrations at his university. He examined the ritual of Kwanzaa and the seven principles (called the *Nguzo Saba*) affirmed each night of the festival. He wrote, “For in creating a cultural orthodoxy designed to combat racism, urban disorder, and a legacy of oppression, we subject ourselves to delusional dogma, the tyranny of conformity, and language that rings of fascist imagery.”⁶ Like Wilde, Early argued that the holiday appealed mainly to the black middle class who found the ritual a kind of therapy to heal the wounds inflicted from racial slights and insults. Along with other influential black scholars, Early was concerned that in creating a mythic African heritage, black nationalists were rejecting the creativity of United States black culture from jazz to the blues to dance to Southern cooking.

Early's essay is longer and more comprehensive than Wilde's. He perceptively notes how Kwanzaa was able to capitalize on black hostility toward the whiteness and commercialism of Christmas. Both authors sense that the Kwanzaa of the 1990s differs from the ritual of the 1960s, but, not being historians, do not attempt to date the transformation or

explain why it occurred. Both authors understand that the holiday became popular mainly among the black bourgeoisie, without providing a complete explanation of the appeal of the holiday to the middle class. To historicize Kwanzaa is to place the holiday within the dual contexts of black nationalism of the 1960s and the development of the black middle class in the 1980s. In this dual context this essay examines the dynamic and protean character of black nationalism and the ways that the ritual of Kwanzaa could address the needs and anxieties of the burgeoning black middle class in the post-civil rights era. There is a gender as well as class dimension to the history of Kwanzaa, in that black women put the familial version of Kwanzaa into practice as they sought a holiday of family gathering and instruction for children.

The origins of Kwanzaa lie in black nationalist responses to the Watts riot of 1966. Because Kwanzaa had a single creator, Maulana Ronald Karenga, Kwanzaa emerged from Karenga's distinct brand of cultural black nationalism and from the aesthetic decisions he made. The early history of Kwanzaa from 1966 to the end of the 1970s is the story of the rise of black cultural nationalism from the urban riots of the 1960s and its floundering amidst government infiltration and internecine warfare between black nationalist groups, including the arrest, murder, or exile of some black nationalists. In a cultural renaissance black artists and intellectuals allied. Kwanzaa rose, fell, and floundered in relation to Karenga's alliances and schisms. His personality, role, and ideas, while crucial to the origins of Kwanzaa, also tended to keep Kwanzaa confined within a limited circle of black cultural nationalists.

Black cultural nationalists believed that the United States was an imperial nation, which had both external colonies (such as the Philippines or Puerto Rico) and colonies situated on the United States mainland. United States blacks, they held, were an internal colony. Just as peoples around the world, but especially in Africa, were struggling to end colonialism, so, too, United States blacks needed to overthrow what they regarded as colonialism in favor of a "struggle for liberation." These ideas appealed most to blacks living in large Northern and Western cities. As Komozi Woodard notes, black cultural nationalism formed in relation to the urban crisis of the 1960s. He writes, "the cultural nationalist strategy of African American radicals was to develop *parallel* black institutions in the void left by the urban crisis, emphasizing the failure of the American government and mainstream economy in providing basic services and offering black nationalism and cooperative

economics as rational alternatives.”⁷ Karenga favored the formation of a black independent political power in municipal government. He also believed that cultural liberation was both a necessity and the first stage in the longer process of establishing a separate black nation.

As 1960s cultural politics, organizational affirmation, imagined historical memory of Africa (with gender assumptions close to the surface), Kwanzaa was entirely Karenga's. At age twenty-five, he was a student, an intellectual, and a revolutionary black nationalist. At the time he created Kwanzaa, Karenga had not visited Africa. He was born Ronald Everett in 1941, one of fourteen children of a Baptist minister from Parsonsburg, Maryland, and a homemaker mother. He moved to Los Angeles in 1959 because he had an older brother, employed as a teacher, living there. Everett attended Los Angeles City College, where he became the first black elected student body president. He was active in campus civil rights activities supporting the work of SNCC and CORE in the South.⁸ Karenga transferred to UCLA and received a B.A. in political science with an emphasis on African Studies in 1963. The same year a Bay area black activist, Donald Warren, founded a small local organization, the Afro-American Association. The group rejected racial integration and called for black self help and greater economic development within black neighborhoods. Members of the organization lectured (using “street language”) in black neighborhoods. Warren asked Karenga to head a Los Angeles branch of the association. The association fell apart within a year because of personality conflicts and struggles for power. But Karenga was on his way toward not only self definition as a nationalist but toward the idea of heading his own organization. In 1964 Karenga received an M.A. in political science from UCLA. His personal transformation into a black nationalist is reflected in two stages of re-naming, around 1963 when he became Ron Karenga (Swahili for tradition) and 1965, when he became Maulana Karenga (master teacher of tradition).⁹ (He also began to shave his head, adopt his trademark Genghis Kahn-type mustache, and wear sunglasses in this period).

Although Karenga was a black nationalist before the Watts riot in August of 1965, the riot helped black nationalism gain ground in Los Angeles and other large cities. The rioting and destruction of property by black residents of a mainly black section of Los Angeles was at the time the largest single urban rebellion of the 1960s, born out of frustration with police brutality and continued inequality amidst the surface prosperity and civil rights legislative advances of the 1960s. The Watts riot lasted five days in August of 1965; it left 34 known dead and about

900 injured.¹⁰ Karenga actually tried to quell the violence because he believed that black residents of Watts were destroying their own neighborhood.¹¹

Less than a month after the Watts riot, Karenga founded a black nationalist organization in Los Angeles, US (as opposed to them) The main task of US under the leadership of Karenga was to create a cultural revolution among US blacks as the basis for a revitalization of African American life and the eventual formation of an independent black political party—or a violent revolution.¹² (Karenga's statement about his ultimate goal varied, depending on his audience and/or his interviewer). Karenga, employed as a Los Angeles County social worker and teaching Swahili at the Fremont Adult School, seems to have recruited many members of US from East Los Angeles gangs. Some former gang members became armed bodyguards of Karenga, his Simba Wachukas (young lions). A few of the Simbas even lived next door to Karenga in a Los Angeles apartment house complex.¹³

Karenga's nationalism led him to create a "vanguard" organization, insist on the learning of a national language, Swahili, and fashion a philosophy that elaborated black nationalism more in cultural than political terms. A vanguard organization was by definition a small one, with about 500 members at its peak.¹⁴ Karenga looked to Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. DuBois and several African intellectuals for inspiration. As to the national language, Swahili was a non-tribal language of the east African coast. Because of the impact of Julius Nyerere's Tanzanian socialism on militant United States blacks in the 1960s, Swahili became the *lingua franca* of American black nationalism.¹⁵ Karenga's Kawaida philosophy was the Swahili name (translated as reason and tradition) for Karenga's fusion of black nationalism, pan-Africanism, and anti-capitalism. Karenga seems to have drafted his Nguso Saba—his seven principles—in September of 1965 as a form of pledge of allegiance to the organization and a statement of the "basic values" fundamental to Kawaida. His followers were supposed to memorize the seven principles in English and Swahili. The seven principles (in English) were unity; self determination; collective work and responsibility; cooperative economics; purpose; creativity; and faith. Cooperative economics was an ideological tenet of Julius Nyerere's form of African socialism; unity was important to Nyerere and to Leopold Senghor, the president of Senegal, whose concept of Pan-Africanism through Negritude depended upon it.¹⁶ At each of the seven days of Kwanzaa, participants

affirmed one of the seven principles. The origin of Karenga's interest in numerology—seven principles, seven candles, seven days—is not clear.¹⁷

A little more than a year after establishing his organization and drafting the Nguso Saba, Karenga held the first Kwanzaa. The first Karamu (last-night feast of Kwanzaa, occurring on New Year's Eve) took place at the Los Angeles apartment of a supporter of US in December of 1966.¹⁸ About fifty people participated in a feast that included African dancing and telling of African folk tales. The apartment was decorated with black, red, and green candles, the black nationalist colors Garvey had chosen. A woman member of US living in one of their communes (called a House) both explained the elements of Kwanzaa and described a Karamu in a 1972 black nationalist publication. She mentioned the same elements as those at the event in 1966. She also described the candle lighting ceremony each night of Kwanzaa, and the importance of having children try to explain one of the seven principles emphasized that night, "since it is for them that this is done." She added that at the karamu everyone present drank from a unity cup and said, "Harambee." The karamu, she wrote, was an all-night New Year's Eve party for adults. She added, "After the African part of Karamu we move to a position of Afro-American expressions and gig all night long."¹⁹

In the late 1960s and early 1970s Kwanzaa spread to other cities where cultural black nationalism flourished—at a branch of US in San Diego, and in San Francisco, Brooklyn, New Orleans, Newark, Chicago, Durham and Atlanta. The diffusion was far more ideological than organizational. US remained a small group and even briefly disbanded in the mid-1970s. Instead, cultural nationalists, who agreed with Karenga about the necessity for a revolution in cultural values, began to adopt Kwanzaa. Those most influenced by Karenga and his seven principles were two black poets and writers, Amiri Baraka (formerly LeRoi Jones) in Newark, New Jersey and Haki Madhubuti (formerly Don L. Lee) in Chicago. These two men were leading figures in the cultural renaissance of the 1960s, called the black arts movement. Karenga had been particularly supportive of the effort to "make warriors out of poets and writers." He flattered these writers, since he assigned culture such a revolutionary role in his philosophy. In turn, black artists added poetry and performances of African dance to Kwanzaa celebrations at black theaters, museums, and cultural institutions.²⁰

Nonetheless, the pattern of adoption of Kwanzaa was quite checkered. Black Muslims, although black nationalists, did not generally cel-

celebrate Kwanzaa because they considered it incompatible with their faith. Moreover, outside of a few Southern cities, Kwanzaa was slow to catch on in the urban South. For example, the first article on Kwanzaa did not appear in Baltimore's black newspaper, *The Afro American*, until 1978. Kwanzaa was virtually nonexistent in the rural South because of the continuing hold of black Christianity and the appeal of Christmas rituals of feasting and visiting neighbors.

Internal divisions within the black nationalist movement also hampered the adoption of Kwanzaa in the late 1960s and 1970s. Kwanzaa was a divisive black nationalist ritual, since it symbolized the differences between the "revolutionary nationalism" of the Black Panthers and the cultural nationalism of Karenga.²¹ At first glance, the Panthers and US appear remarkably similar. They were relatively small groups, founded about the same time in California cities by charismatic men. Karenga even participated in Panther meetings in the early years. Like Karenga, two founders of the Panthers, Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton, had belonged to the Afro-American Association. Both groups were heavily armed; both groups opposed the war in Vietnam. As the Panthers grew, however, they developed strong ties with white leaders of the New Left and embraced their own version of Marxism and support for wars of national liberation on many continents, not just the African one.

The Panthers castigated cultural nationalist ritual and Karenga's community activities. In 1969 the Black Panther newspaper began publishing a series of articles attacking Karenga as a "bald headed pig" and his organization as a group of "sissies and acid heads in yellow sunglasses and African robes." (The Black Panther paper claimed Karenga was using LSD. Charging opponents with lack of manliness—or even homosexuality—was a standard feature of much black nationalist rhetoric in this period).²² Bobby Seale of the Black Panthers made fun of Karenga's "weird rituals and "strange fashions," referring to the sunglasses, buta (toga-like olive green garment), and the carved tiki doll hanging from Karenga's neck. Elaine Brown of the Panthers dubbed the post-riot Watts Summer Festival (which US helped to sponsor) a "Darkey Carnival" or "Darkey Parade." Panthers further argued that the desire to invent African traditions was at best apolitical, and at worst a form of escapism, deterring a focus on contemporary social and economic problems.

Karenga's feud with the Black Panthers, especially between 1969 and 1971, if not instigated by the FBI, then certainly fueled by them, led

to permanent enmity between the two organizations.²³ The Panthers believed that Karenga was a spy (perhaps for the Los Angeles police department or the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Rights) or an FBI informer. These charges have never been proven.²⁴ The Panthers were suspicious for several reasons. Suddenly in 1968 US had money to buy new vans and cars. Panthers were frequently stopped by Los Angeles and San Diego police for carrying weapons but the Panthers believed that the police did not stop gun-toting US members. After Dr. King's assassination, Karenga attended a meeting with the Los Angeles police chief designed to discuss how to quell rioting. Moreover, Governor Ronald Reagan called Karenga immediately after King's murder. Karenga attended a private meeting with Reagan, where, he claimed, he tried to persuade the governor to release some US members from prison.²⁵

Of the many specific incidents of violence between the two groups, the most significant was the murder of two Black Panthers in a parking lot at UCLA in January of 1969 by four members of US. The Panthers and US were fighting for control over the power to choose the administrators for UCLA's newly developing black studies program. Although Karenga was not present when the murders occurred, the Panthers believed he ordered the killings.²⁶ There were several factors contributing to the murders. The FBI's efforts under its counterintelligence program, COINTELPRO, between 1969 and 1971 served to exacerbate Panther-US rivalry and to curtail the sporadic efforts of nationalist leaders to effect a truce between the two warring organizations. FBI informers seem to have exploited the enmity between Panthers and US by relaying inflammatory statements about the one group to the other in the context of a situation where both groups were armed and already held antagonistic views about the other. In addition, the fact that the Panthers and US recruited members from the Gladiators and the Sawsons, two rival youth gangs, added combustion to the mix.²⁷ After the murders Karenga, who liked to call the Panthers "kamikaze niggers," believed that the Panthers intended to retaliate for the deaths of their two members and were plotting to kill him.²⁸ In addition, members of US, their weapons hidden in briefcases they carried, threatened the black nationalist organization headed by Amiri Baraka in Newark because Baraka had refused Karenga's orders to cancel a major conference.²⁹

Kwanzaa grew slowly in the early years; the preoccupation of Karenga and US with physical survival probably retarded its growth. Government infiltration may have contributed to a decline in US mem-

bership and to imprisonment of several US leaders and members.³⁰ Undoubtedly, Karenga's imprisonment at the medium security California Men's Colony at San Luis Obispo between 1971 and 1975 impeded the growth of Kwanzaa, since the major leader of the organization was unavailable to tour the country and speak on behalf of the holiday.

Moreover, the incident that led to Karenga's imprisonment increased his unsavory reputation in some black circles and probably deterred interest in Kwanzaa among mainstream black publications such as *Ebony* or *Jet* or adoption of Kwanzaa at black churches. Karenga was sentenced to prison in 1971 on multiple charges of conspiracy and felonious assault in the beatings of two twenty-year old women, both former members of US. The two women, held in a garage, were burned with cigarettes and a hot soldering iron was placed in the mouth of one woman. They were tortured in order to make them confess that they had tried to poison Karenga. Amiri Baraka, who broke with Karenga in 1974 over political differences in their mutual path toward a nationalist form of Marxist-Leninism, claimed that Karenga was at this time dependent on "diet pills" (the Panthers said LSD) which led him to slur his words, stagger about, and become incoherent.³¹ Karenga's first wife, Brenda already separated from him, was a witness against him at his trial in Los Angeles. She testified that Karenga had sat on the stomach of one of the girls, while water was forced into the girl's mouth through a hose.³² Karenga, convicted by a majority black and Hispanic jury, maintained he was innocent of the charges.³³

The holiday thus carried the weight of this specific incident, as well as of Karenga's fairly well-known attitudes toward black women and toward Christianity. Karenga in the 1960s believed that the proper role of black women was to be submissive to black men; he opposed equality between the sexes. In speeches between 1965 and 1967 he argued that "equality is false; it is the devil's concept." He said that the black husband had "any right that does not destroy the collective needs of the family."³⁴ The *Quotable Karenga* (1967) reproduced quotations from Karenga's speeches, hostile to Christianity. Patterned after letter red books of quotations of Chairman Mao, popular in leftist circles, the *Quotable Karenga* was a compilation of short excerpts from Karenga's speeches, intended to be deliberately provocative. Karenga is quoted as saying, "Christianity is a white religion. It has a white God, and any "Negro" who believes in (sic) it is a sick "Negro." How can you pray to a white man? If you believe in him, no wonder you catch so much hell." He also described Jesus as "psychotic. He said if you didn't believe what he did you would burn forever."³⁵

It seems possible that dislike or distrust of Karenga deterred celebration of Kwanzaa among a small group of intellectuals and devout Christians. There were occasional denunciations of Karenga for being hostile to Christianity.³⁶ As a result of the growth of the women's movement and black feminism, black women intellectuals were keenly aware of Karenga's sexist attitudes and practices. In 1997, the feminist social critic bell hooks was interviewed in *Essence* and offered several reasons why she did not celebrate Kwanzaa. She began by noting her dislike for what she considered the rigid format of Kwanzaa and the Ngusa Saba. She also told the interviewer, "Another troubling thing about Kwanzaa is that you're talking about patriarchal Black Nationalist men who decided they had to reinvent [these principles]. As if they didn't already exist."³⁷

After having survived in the doldrums through Karenga's imprisonment and the second half of the 1970s, Kwanzaa was discovered by the black mainstream. The first article on Kwanzaa in *Essence*, which appeared in 1979, appears to have been an act of self-promotion by a Bay Area nationalist, who had written a Kwanzaa manual. In 1979, black power was a fading slogan; *Essence* took little risk in publishing an article about it. The more significant date is 1983, when *Ebony* and *Jet* first published articles about Kwanzaa.³⁸ Black sororities began to invite speakers to show their members how to celebrate Kwanzaa. Cedric McClester's handbook on the holiday, written in a more accessible style than Karenga's or Madhubuti's pamphlets, appeared in 1985. He developed a lengthier script for the Karamu. He also created the folk figure of Nia Umoja, a Kwanzaa "Santa" and teller of African tales, who brought gifts to children.³⁹ Large national museums, New York City's American Museum of Natural History (beginning in 1985) and the Smithsonian (beginning in 1988), staged Kwanzaa celebrations. These large institutions, located near black ghetto populations, sought to add programming that showed interest and demonstrated good will toward African Americans. Celebrations of Kwanzaa at many college campuses date from this period. Increased publicity about Kwanzaa on television, radio, and mainstream newspapers encouraged the celebration, although many first learned about it from a friend.⁴⁰ Some of those who celebrated Kwanzaa in public school or at a community center later came to practice it at home.

Writers other than Karenga became more important in the diffusion of Kwanzaa because they wrote in a popular style and thought of Kwanzaa

in decorative and culinary rather than revolutionary terms. To some extent Karenga became an elder statesman, Kwanzaa's founding father. Black magazines interviewed him, using the format of the celebrity profile. But some Kwanzaa manuals did not even mention him. Black newspapers regularly described Kwanzaa as an "authentic harvest festival, first celebrated by the ancient Egyptians."⁴¹ In so doing, Karenga did not receive proper credit for authorship. He wrote a small book about Kwanzaa in 1977, in part to set the record straight.⁴²

The rediscovered Kwanzaa was no longer hostile toward Christianity and Christmas. As a holiday that could be defined as religious, secular, or both, Kwanzaa came to be celebrated at a black church—initially not at the actual service, but as a separate program. Kwanzaa became more successful as it was seen as a supplement to Christmas rather than as an alternative to it. The 1983 articles in black magazines made clear that Kwanzaa was compatible with Christmas. The headline of the first article about Kwanzaa in *Ebony* in 1983 read, "The New Soul Christmas" and the photograph of a family accompanying the article showed a Christmas tree in the background.⁴³ Kwanzaa could also be redefined as a less commercial Christmas, and therefore, a holiday less sullied by the marketplace.⁴⁴ Black writers in women's magazines wrote that Kwanzaa was a Christmas holiday from which one need not feel alienated.⁴⁵

As part of becoming more mainstream, and more compatible with Christianity and Christmas, Kwanzaa also became more American black, more celebrated at home—and more choral (in that participants often sang "Lift Every Voice and Sing"). Writers in magazines and authors of Kwanzaa manuals now claimed that southern black cooking—along with cosmopolitan borrowing from West African, Ethiopian, and Caribbean cuisine—was suitable for Kwanzaa feasts. (Karenga had advocated West African cooking). Cookbooks for Kwanzaa and celebration manuals for a mass audience, rather than a nationalist select few, appeared as it became clear to publishers that there was a market for such books. Because Kwanzaa was most often celebrated in the home, it was usually women who organized the event and did the necessary shopping and cooking.⁴⁶

Writers in black popular magazines of the 1980s transformed the seven principles into statements of middle-class belief, along with the newly popular therapeutic idea of "healing." More importantly, magazine writers in *Ebony* and *Essence* combined black nationalism with black middle-class allegiance to individual achievement. Thus, even racial unity was individualized. A writer for *Essence* thought that "if we embrace unity and believe in ourselves, our families and our leaders, we

will be victorious in our struggles as individuals and as a race.”⁴⁷ Other celebrants saw in the seven principles affirmations of upward mobility. As part of the feast on New Year’s Eve in 1984, a Detroit schoolteacher recalled her conversation with her four children about the Nguso Saba. She made sure that “the children committed themselves to going to college, so that they could be useful and helpful to themselves.” A black schoolchild in Rochester, New York translated the principle of “purpose” into wanting “a good home and a good school and a good community. I will make a plan every day so I will know what to do to make the good things happen.”⁴⁸ Occurring between Christmas and New Year’s, Kwanzaa could function as both the black Christmas and the black New Year’s Eve. Thus, Kwanzaa became the time when adults made New Year’s resolutions.⁴⁹

Writers in the 1980s also helped create a nationalism that used the rhetoric of nationhood (not diaspora or exile), valorized Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali, and incorporated more recognition of African American history. United States blacks were now portrayed as having their own heroes within the United States, not just in Africa. (After having been released from prison, Karenga himself had included mention of black American heroes in a newly written libation statement for Kwanzaa). As one instance of this new way of thinking, a Baltimore black newspaper in 1985 claimed that as Kwanzaa became more popular, it would hopefully “come to symbolize each year another step toward the goal of full citizenship into American society.”⁵⁰

More than anything else, Kwanzaa became more widespread because it served the important function of affirming racial and familial identity within the black middle class. There are no social surveys to prove definitively that most celebrants were middle class. Newspaper and magazine articles invariably describe events attended by the wide swath of the black middle class—beauticians, postal clerks, administrators and managers, nurses, teachers, caterers, writers, lawyers, doctors, and students at universities. It seems likely that such articles accurately reflected the class composition of the celebrants although there were certainly some working-class celebrants as well.

The ideological needs and interests of the black middle class are central to understanding the growth in the popularity of Kwanzaa. The black middle class since the 1960s was larger than ever before and less dependent on racial segregation for its livelihood. It had been expanding since the 1950s and grew even more during the 1960s. One reason for the growth was the general economic boom of the 1960s. The other was

affirmative action—in the public schools, at colleges and universities, in private and government employment. One result of affirmative action was an increase in the number of blacks in the professions, such as law and medicine. The black middle class has been defined in terms of education, occupation, income, net worth, self label, or as a way of viewing the world. Whatever the definition, it was burgeoning. The proportion of black households with incomes of \$50,000 or more in 1977 was 9.9 percent; a decade later, the percentage was 13.5 percent. There were comparable increases in the \$35,000 to \$50,000 income range.⁵¹ Between 1976 and 1978, 28 percent of blacks defined themselves as middle class; the percentage of blacks defining themselves as middle class rose eight points by the next decade, according to social science surveys.⁵²

If the black middle class was rising since the 1950s, and growing rapidly by 1966, why did Kwanzaa not gain popularity until 1983? One possibility is that black society, like the rest of America, had become more conservative and had embraced rhetoric about “family values.” Jimmy Carter had first introduced this term in his 1976 presidential campaign. The black public in the 1980s often defended the holiday as a way to strengthen and affirm the family. Kwanzaa was declared “a celebration of black family life,” a time for family gathering. A Berkeley high school counselor explained her interest in Kwanzaa in precisely those terms. She remarked in 1984, “I had attended a Kwanzaa festival the previous year and it seemed like a good way of bringing the family together and [for] the adults [to learn] about their historical beginnings.”⁵³

The black version of the idea of family values was to teach the child his or her racial heritage. Middle-class black mothers upheld the ideal of a sentimental view of the child and of the mother-child bond. The child, in this view, was seen both as an innocent being and a malleable one, to be properly instructed in a racial or religious heritage. Because of the history of racial discrimination and American racial definitions of who was black, the complex heritage of African Americans was traced to African ancestry.⁵⁴ The waning of black radicalism, the aging of the generation influenced by the civil rights movement, and the raising of children in racially integrated settings seemed to require additional efforts. In turn, the desire to develop the child’s racial identity fed the demand for Kwanzaa children’s books, children’s programs at museums during the Christmas season, and programs about Kwanzaa in the public schools.

Kwanzaa was not only a family holiday but also a ritual of African

American identity, arising out of the changing racial attitudes of the black middle class. In the 1960s pollsters found that the blacks most distrustful of whites had low incomes; by the 1980s, higher income African Americans exhibited the most distrust. In the 1960s the black middle class, when polled, was optimistic about the opportunities opening up for all blacks, but especially for professionals. By the 1980s the optimism was gone. To political scientist Jennifer Hochschild, middle class blacks in the 1980s were "succeeding more but enjoying it less."⁵⁵

There are several reasons why middle class blacks by the 1980s did not enjoy the success they had fought to achieve. One reason is that they were beginning to measure their situation not by the standards of where they have come from but by the standards of their white peers. Compared to whites, the black middle class had lower net worth and more responsibilities for kin and neighbors who had not fared well. The rise of the black middle class thrust more blacks than ever before into situations where they functioned as tokens in a largely white environment. The black middle class was chafing at the racial slights and discrimination encountered in taxis, offices, hotels, businesses, neighborhoods, shopping centers, restaurants, and at universities. They also felt their economic and social progress was threatened. The resurgence of interest in Kwanzaa began a few years after the growth of the attack on affirmative action. The Supreme Court decision in *Regents of University of California v. Bakke* (1978) restricted the range of affirmative action remedies.⁵⁶ In his presidential campaign in 1980, Ronald Reagan called for an end to such programs. This attack on affirmative action contributed to the growth in pessimism among the black middle class. Finally, the middle class felt responsibility toward the black poor and recognized that social conditions for them were worsening.⁵⁷ Crack cocaine was beginning to devastate the family and personal life of the black poor.

Even so, the significant mass movements of black nationalism in the twentieth century, Garveyism, black Communism, and the Black Muslims, drew support from the poor or the working class. Even though nationalism is a discourse about race, not class, black nationalists have usually regarded the black middle class with a certain skepticism. After his release from prison in 1975, Karenga declared himself a Marxist. He favored an alliance between the white and black working class and considered the black middle class too wedded to capitalism and individualism to be capable of revolutionary change.⁵⁸ Garvey, Muhammad, and Malcolm X, like Karenga, viewed the black bourgeoisie as potential traitors (in Malcolm X's words, "house niggers") because of their class

interests and lack of proper racial consciousness. Up to the 1960s, the black middle class formed the backbone of support for the NAACP and its program of racial integration.

Still, intellectuals and the educated middle class usually lead the effort to commemorate holidays, establish museums, and collect folklore. Usually, a college-educated urban elite initiates an interest in the arts, history, folklore, and ritual. Most of the writers in the Black Arts movement of the 1960s had graduated from college. New myths, folklore and ritual initially appeal to the educated black middle class because of their reading, taste for abstraction, and greater opportunities for foreign travel. Moreover, as Early noted, it is the middle class which wants to make holidays more decorative and aesthetically pleasing through purchases of consumer items, including gifts and the serving of family feasts. They could display their status and racial identity by purchasing a kinara (a seven-pronged candleholder), wearing West African garb, and for women, a headwrap, and by photographing the family feast.⁵⁹

This display of status and racial identity is a variant form of Herbert Gans' concept of "symbolic ethnicity," the desire to maintain an ethnic identity while still living a middle-class style of life. In this form of ethnicity, it was possible to "feel black" while residing in a largely white suburb and/or attending a largely white university. Indeed, the desire to "feel black" was actually increased by such circumstances. However, Gans argued that symbolic ethnicity could exist and flourish without consciousness of persecution, whereas the black middle class combined middle class status with rising indignation at being discriminated against on racial grounds.⁶⁰

Solving these crises of black middle-class identity in the 1980s was part of the appeal of Kwanzaa; the holiday also gained adherents from increasing publicity as it became more commercial. Consumer culture commodifies identity; it allows people to use purchased material objects as statements of racial identity, even as they participate in American consumer culture.⁶¹ Still, some of the appeal of Kwanzaa was that it was less commercial than Christmas. (Madhubuti and Karenga had adopted various stances toward gift giving, from insisting that there should be none at all to arguing that gifts were acceptable, if they were small and only given to children).

By the 1980s, the balance had decidedly swung in favor of combining Kwanzaa with shopping, sending of cards, giving gifts, and home decorating. The leaders in the commercialization of Kwanzaa were black entrepreneurs. Two of them, Jose Ferrer and Ahmed Malik, held a small

exhibit of goods for Kwanzaa in a high school gymnasium in Harlem in 1981; by 1989, sixty vendors were exhibiting black dolls, African imports, books, sculpture, paintings, and Kwanzaa greeting cards at a Kwanzaa exposition.⁶² Another Kwanzaa Expo began in Saint Louis in 1983. These trade fairs subsequently expanded into a huge several day-long shows of Kwanzaa items held in larger and more centrally located quarters.⁶³ In the 1980s most of the business owners at the exhibits were black, some former nationalist radicals, who had opened bookstores, African import stores, toy companies, greeting card, or book publishing businesses.

Because of the growing success of Kwanzaa and the subsequent redefinition of it as a supplement rather than alternative to Christmas, public schools began to recognize the holiday. Black nationalist teachers, most of whom were women, introduced Kwanzaa in their classrooms as early as 1969, in part as a means to remedy student ignorance about Africa.⁶⁴ The first published school district manuals date from 1979.⁶⁵ The major growth in public school celebrations came in the middle to late 1980s, that is, a few years after the rediscovery of Kwanzaa by *Jet* and *Ebony*. Public school teachers, white as well as black, organized Kwanzaa events. The holiday appears to have been celebrated both in school districts in university towns and in large urban systems with a significant black population.

Although individual teachers created their own activities, school departments in some large cities began to issue curriculum guides. A manual published in the Portland public schools in 1987 showed the pattern of diffusion. A black woman librarian in a Portland public school encouraged black women teachers in the newly created "Multicultural/Multiethnic Office" to prepare an instructional guide for the school district on activities for Kwanzaa (e.g., a yam race, making a kinara).⁶⁶ The goal was to increase the understanding of students of the history, culture, and contribution to the United States of African Americans. Teachers came to believe that by recognizing the "culture" of black students, they were showing them respect.⁶⁷ A Kwanzaa celebration was thus a symbolic way for the school and the teacher to acknowledge the African heritage of black students, even though the vast majority of the black students did not celebrate Kwanzaa.

In the twentieth century, public school celebrations at Christmastime reflected prevailing ideas about the American cultural mosaic. The initial purpose of incorporating invented traditions into the classroom was the one Hobsbawm suggested, the goal of developing emotional ties to

the nation. Thus, in the Progressive era teachers used classroom celebrations of President's birthdays, holidays, and the pledge of allegiance to the flag as a means of encouraging national identity and reinforcing Christian hegemony. By the 1950s the balance began to shift in favor of acknowledging religious differences. Teachers in majority-Christian classrooms made some token attempts to acknowledge Chanukah.⁶⁸ Kwanzaa in the 1970s was a ritual created by black teachers for black students. By the late 1980s teachers in an integrated or even mainly white classroom celebrated Kwanzaa as a way of affirming multiculturalism, the belief that all cultures were equally valued and no single one was dominant. To the celebration of Chanukah and Kwanzaa were added other holidays, Diwali, Buddha's birthday, Chinese New Year, and sometimes even Winter Solstice.

Black nationalism of the 1960s created Kwanzaa, but Kwanzaa as it developed and grew helped to shape black identity, specifically, the racial identity of the black middle class. Originating at the nexus of black nationalism and black alienation from Christmas, Kwanzaa expanded both because of the needs for racial self-definition of the black middle class and from consumerism intended to provide a satisfying substitute for and addition to Christmas. Most of the influential authors of Kwanzaa manuals were men; women took on most of the work of organizing the Kwanzaa festival in the home. As more black women created feasts at home, they fused ideas of race with those of family sentiment. In so doing, they erased entirely Karenga's initial ideas about the submissiveness of women.

The history of Kwanzaa shows considerable change as it became transformed from an organizational celebration to a family one, and from a ritual celebrating black nationalist unity to one also embracing and affirming family history, feasting, homecoming, and cultural difference.⁶⁹ Consumer culture, far from creating a mass society, helped to create an ethnically segmented one. The black middle class made relatively simple ceremonies more elaborate with the purchase of wine cups, straw mats, candleholders, black, red, and green candles, kente cloth, and the wearing of West African garb. But Kwanzaa also drew much of its appeal from appearing to be the less commercial alternative to Christmas. As both a small nationalist ritual and a larger one in the 1980s, Kwanzaa had been mainly practiced by the middle class. Kwanzaa helped to allay the anxieties, fears, and ongoing rejection and discrimination

middle-class blacks encountered in their interactions with individual whites and the larger American society.

The traditional view is that black nationalism and acculturation to the dominant society are diametrically opposed. The effect of practicing Kwanzaa was to fuse the two, just as successful ritual is always said to bridge opposing values. This could only be done, however, as Kwanzaa was redefined to uphold a more middle-class conception of black nationalism. The black middle class has usually been noted for its adherence to entrepreneurship, and the values of individuality, self help, and upward mobility. The seven principles were redefined to affirm these values. As Gerald Early argued, Kwanzaa allowed upwardly mobile middle-class blacks to feel comfortable with belonging to the middle class by reassuring them that they remained true to their racial identity. Kwanzaa was meeting the needs for racial self definition that the celebration of Christmas alone could not. It seems likely that the blackening of Christmas and the growth of Kwanzaa proceeded apace, the one reinforcing the other. Thus, the work of racial self-definition probably went on at Christmas as well as at Kwanzaa.⁷⁰

Some interpretive questions about the impact of Kwanzaa are the most difficult to answer. Did the creation of a mythic African past substitute for engagement with contemporary African nations and the need for assistance in trade, development, and peacekeeping? The anti-apartheid movement blossomed in the United States in the 1980s at the same time as Kwanzaa grew. There is at least a positive correlation among African Americans between rising interest in Kwanzaa and the struggle to end apartheid in South Africa. Similarly did the cultural ritual substitute for political engagement among the black middle class? Was Kwanzaa an emblem of the growing class division within black America? The decline of black power, and of specific organizations, such as the Black Panthers, occurred by the early 1970s. Would there have been more political activism if Kwanzaa had not been invented? That seems unlikely.

The one pertinent negative assessment is that Kwanzaa creates a mythic version of Africa, which embodies Western assumptions about the nation, civilization, and about Africa. In taking up Kwanzaa, African Americans were creating their own highly eclectic image of Africa. Europeans as much as Africans, black intellectuals along with European travellers and journalists, Velentin Mudimbe argues, helped to create the idea of the continent of Africa as a single coherent identity, a super-nation.⁷¹

The creation of Kwanzaa reflected this decidedly Western gaze—making “Africa” the exotic other—in which a composite harvest festival was interpreted as the changeless essence of Africanness. In exoticizing the African continent, American blacks, far from revealing a pan-Africanist solidarity based on familiarity, instead showed how Western their views were. In the decades since the 1960s educated Africans saw American blacks constructing Africans in this manner. Africans who had migrated to the United States since 1965 were sometimes aware of Kwanzaa. Those who identified themselves as African Americans tended to celebrate it; those who saw themselves as African nationals rarely did so.⁷²

While black Americans viewed the African continent with rose-colored glasses, they removed them to perceive clearly the whiteness of Santa and commercialism of the American Christmas.⁷³ Because Christmas is such a commanding, indeed, overwhelming presence in American culture, attempts to create alternatives to it inevitably stand in its shadow. Kwanzaa, as it developed, took on many features of the Christmas season—parades, greeting cards, a Santa, charitable giving, shopping at after Christmas sales, New Year’s Eve parties, New Year’s resolutions, and greetings of “Merry Kwanzaa.”⁷⁴ Eventually Kwanzaa, like Christmas, became so successful that it was capable of generating nostalgia for one’s childhood, festive excess, popular songs, criticism from black intellectuals, and discontent with excessive commercialism.

NOTES

1. I want to thank Wileesha Taylor for research assistance. I have made use of some of the research by undergraduate students in History 298, Fall, 1998. As a class project they examined reports about Kwanzaa in black newspapers. Juliet Walker first suggested that I research Kwanzaa in black newspapers. Komozi Woodard furnished me a copy of his 1985 interview with Maulana Karenga. I have benefitted from the comments and suggestions of Scot Brown, Laurence Glasco, Fred Hoxie, James R. Barrett, Diane Koenker, Clare Crowston, Orville Vernon Burton, Joseph Pleck, and Komozi Woodard. Nancy Hafkin answered many questions I posed about African history.

2. Maritz Marketing Research polled a nationally representative sample of 907 adults in 1977. Tibbett L. Spear, “Stretching the Holiday season,” *American Demographics*, 19 (November, 1997): 42–49. The article did not report whether the interviewers asked about the type of Kwanzaa celebrations the respondents participated in. For a bibliography about Kwanzaa, see Itibari M. Zulu, *Kwanzaa 1969–1989: A Selected Bibliography* (Los Angeles, 1994).

3. Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 1–14;

Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin, "Tradition, Genuine or Spurious," *Journal of American Folklore*, 97 (1984): 273–290; John R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton, N.J., 1994). Every history of an American festival, holiday, and domestic occasion is a study of an invented tradition. The histories vary in how explicitly they embrace the phrase and Hobsbawm's conceptualization. For examples of his influence on U.S. historiography on this subject, see April Schultz, "'The Pride of the Race Had Been Touched: The 1925 Norse-American Immigration Centennial and Ethnic Identity,'" *Journal of American History*, 77 (March, 1991): 1265–1295; John Bodnar, "Symbols and Servants and the Limits of Public History," *Journal of American History*, 73 (June, 1986): 137–151; Rudolph Vecoli, "'Primo Maggio' in the U.S.: An Invented Tradition of the Italian Anarchists," in *May Day Celebration*, ed. Andrea Panaccione (Venezia, 1988), pp. 55–83; Kathleen Conzen, "Ethnicity as Festive Culture: German-America on Parade," in *The Invention of Ethnicity*, ed. Werner Sollors (New York, 1989), pp. 44–76; Stephen Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas* (New York, 1996); Penne L. Restad, *Christmas in America: A History* (New York, 1995); Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of Holidays* (Princeton, N. J., 1995); S. W. Pope, *Patriotic Games: Sporting Traditions in the American Imagination 1876–1926* (New York, 1977), pp. 85–119; Michael Kazin and Steven J. Ross, "America's Labor Day: The Dilemma of a Worker's Celebration," *Journal of American History*, 78 (March, 1992): 1294–1323; Larry Danielson, "St. Lucia in Lindsborg, Kansas," in *Creative Ethnicity: Symbols and Strategies of Contemporary Ethnic Life*, ed. Stephen Stern and John Allan Cicala (Logan, Utah, 1991), pp. 187–203; Len Travers, *Celebrating the Fourth: Independence Day and the Rites of Nationalism in the Early Republic* (Amherst, Mass., 1997); Shane White, "'It was a Proud Day': African Americans, Festivals, and Parades in the North, 1741–1834," *Journal of American History*, 81 (June, 1994): 13–50; Timothy Meagher, "'Why Should We Care for a Little Trouble on a Walk through the Mid': St. Patrick's and the Columbus Day Parades in Worcester, Massachusetts, 1845–1915," *New England Quarterly* 58 (March, 1985): 5–26; Kenneth Moss, "St. Patrick's Day Celebrations and the Formation of Irish-American Identity, 1845–1875," *Journal of Social History*, 29 (Fall, 1995): 125–148; William H. Wiggins, Jr., *O Freedom! Afro-American Emancipation Celebrations* (Nashville, Tenn., 1990); David Waldstreicher, *Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776–1820* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1997).

4. Elizabeth H. Pleck, "The Making of the Domestic Occasion: The History of Thanksgiving in the United States," *Journal of Social History*, 32 (Summer, 1999): 773–789.

5. Anna Day Wilde, "Mainstreaming Kwanzaa," *The Public Interest*, 119 (Spring, 1995): 68–79.

6. Gerald Early, "Dreaming of a Black Christmas: Kwanzaa bestows the gifts of therapy," *Harper's*, 294 (January, 1995): 55–61; Adolph Reed, Jr., "Marxism and Nationalism in Afro-America," *Social Theory and Practice*, 1 (Fall, 1971): 16; "Do We Need Kwanzaa?" *Essence*, 29 (December, 1997): 68, 70.

7. Komozi Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1999), p. 8.

8. Interview with Ron Karenga by Komozi Woodard, 27 December 1985, in the possession of Dr. Komozi Woodard.

9. Victor S. Alexander, "Interview: Dr. Maulana Ron Karenga," *African Commentary*, 1 (October, 1989): 61–64. In 1968 he was also calling himself Ron Ndbeszitha Everett-Karenga, "Militant Negro Leader," *New York Times* (2 September 1968), p. 13.

10. Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (Charlottesville, VA., 1965).
11. "Black Enigma," *Wall Street Journal* (26 July 1968), p. 15.
12. Maulana Karenga, *The Quotable Karenga* (Los Angeles, 1967), p. 11.
13. Imamu Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka* (New York, 1984), p. 254.
14. "Black Enigma," p. 15.
15. Interview with Ron Karenga by Komozi Woodard, 17 December 1985. Nonetheless, even in the use of Swahili, Karenga made significant alterations to adapt to holiday circumstances. First in Swahili is usually spelled Kwanza, with one a. Karenga wanted a group of seven children to participate in the festival by spelling out the letters of the holiday, so he added an extra a. M. Ron Karenga, *Kwanzaa: Origins, Concepts, Practice* (Inglewood, Calif., 1977), p. 16; Maulana Ron Karenga, "The Black Community and the University: A Community Organizer's Perspective," in *Black Studies in the University: A Symposium*, ed. Armstead L. Robinson, Craig C. Foster and Donald H. Ogilvie (New Haven, Conn., 1969), p. 54.
16. Imamu Halisi, *Kitabu: Beginning Concepts in Kawaida* (Los Angeles, 1971), p. 2; Maulana Karenga, *Kawaida Theory: An Introductory Outline* (Inglewood, Calif., 1980).
17. Halisi, ed., *Kitabu*, p. 8. The number seven does appear frequently in the Bible.
18. Karenga, *Kwanzaa*, p. 20; Elizabeth Softky, "A Kwanzaa Memory: Growing Up With Dr. Karenga," *Washington Post* (20 December 1995), E1, E4; Scot D. Brown, "The US Organization," pp. 130–132.
19. Kasisi Washao, "Marriage Ceremony," in *African Congress: A Documentary of the First Modern Pan-African Congress*, ed. Imanu Baraka (LeRoi Jones) (New York, 1972), p. 186.
20. Komozi Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation*, pp. xi–xiii, 43.
21. Bobby Seale of the Panthers criticized Karenga's sexism but the main differences between the Panthers and US were about ideological matters other than gender. Tracey Matthews, "'No One Ever Asks, What a Man's Place in the Revolution Is': Gender and the Politics of the Black Panther Party 1966–1971," in *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*, ed. Charles E. Jones (Baltimore, 1998), pp. 272–273.
22. E. Frances White, "Africa on My Mind: Gender, Counter Discourse and African-American Nationalism," *Journal of Women's History*, 2, 1 (Spring, 1990): 75; Cheryl Clarke, "The Failure to Transform: Homophobia in the Black Community," in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. Barbara Smith (New York, 1983), pp. 197–208; Isaac Julien, "Black Is, Black Ain't: Notes on De-Essentializing Black Identities," in *Black Popular Culture*, ed. Gina Dent (Seattle, 1992), pp. 255–263; Isaac Julien and Koben Mercer, "True Confessions: A Discourse on Images of Black Male Sexuality," in *Brother to Brother: New Writings by Black Gay Men*, ed. Essex Hemphill (Boston, 1991), pp. 161–173.
23. Kenneth O'Reilly, "Racial Matters": *The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960–1972* (New York, 1989), pp. 304–309.
24. Historian Clayborne Carson argues that he has seen nothing in FBI Cointelpro files to indicate that Karenga was a government informer. *AP Online* (22 April 1998), no page.
25. "Black Enigma," p. 1; Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* (New York, 1992), pp. 176–177.
26. U.S. Congress, Senate, *Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans, Book III*, S.R. No. 94–755, 94th Congress, second session (Washington, D.C., 1976), p. 194. For a defense of these

charges against Karenga, see Scott Ngozi-Brown, "The US organization: Maulana Karenga, and conflict with the Black Panther Party: A Critique of Sectarian Influences on Historical Discourse," *Journal of Black Studies*, 28, 2 (November, 1997): 157–171. Gail Sheehy provides an account of the deaths of two Black Panthers, Bunchey Carter and John Huggins, in *Panthermania: The Case of Black Against Black in One American City* (New York, 1971), pp. 16–21. She was sympathetic to the Panther point of view. *Muhammad Speaks* repeated the charges against Karenga. See (19 November 1971), pp. 4–5. For a Panther recollection of the shootout, see Brown, *A Taste of Power*, pp. 156–170.

27. Brown, *A Taste of Power*, p. 176.

28. Baraka, *Autobiography*, p. 279.

29. Woodward, *A Nation within a Nation*, p. 166.

30. Scott Brown, "The US Organization," pp. 157–171.

31. Baraka, *Autobiography*, p. 280, 289; *Los Angeles Herald Dispatch* (13 May 1971), p. 1.

32. Brenda Karenga also used the first name Haiba. *Jet*, xl (3 June 1971): 54.

33. The jury consisted of six African Americans, one Hispanic, and five whites. Imamu Clyde Halisi, "Maulana Ron Karenga: Black Leader in Captivity," *The Black Scholar*, 3 (May, 1972): pp. 27–31; *Los Angeles Sentinel* (20 May 1971), pp. A–1, A–4; *Los Angeles Herald Dispatch* (3 June 1971), p. 1.

34. Halisi and Mtume, ed., *The Quotable Karenga*, p. 20. US members in San Diego took submissiveness to mean that black women should not play any leadership role in the organization. When Angela Davis, then a graduate student living in San Diego, sought to organize local activities, US members criticized her and told her that the proper place for women was to give their men "strength and inspiration" so that the men could carry on the struggle."

Karenga believed that women in his organization should dress so as to make themselves sexually attractive to men. Karenga told the poet Amiri Baraka that "they [women in US] should show flesh to intrigue men and not be covered so much." As Amiri Baraka (who later broke with Karenga) recalled, "he was always making 'sexy' remarks to women, calling them 'freaks' and commenting loudly on their physical attributes. In Los Angeles, Karenga even sanctioned 'polygamy' and was rumored himself to have pulled many of the women in the LA organization." Ritual greetings of US members mirrored Karenga's beliefs. When he walked by, Baraka recalled, "the women were supposed to 'salimu' or 'submit', crossing their arms on their breasts and bowing slowly." Angela Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* (New York, 1974), p. 161; Baraka, *Autobiography*, p. 200, 208, 275.

35. Halisi and Mtume, *The Quotable Karenga*, p. 25.

36. "Karenga's Contradictions," updated 17 December 1997, <<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homespages/CMorrow/contrdct.html>>. This condemnation is quite recent. Black churches did not initially hold Kwanzaa celebrations, either in their basements or in the main part of the church. There is an absence of evidence as to whether black churches were ignorant of Kwanzaa or actively opposed to it. I suspect that there were more ministers and church leaders in the latter than the former category because black nationalists, like Karenga, were known to be hostile to Christianity.

37. "Do We Need Kwanzaa?" *Essence*, 28, 8 (December, 1997): 68. E. Frances White has written, "Karenga has significantly modified his sexist ideas about gender relations, but the ideology of complementarity and collective family needs continues to work against the liberation of black women." E. Frances White, "Africa on My Mind," p. 75.

38. Omonike Weusi-Puryear, "How I Came to Celebrate Kwanza, *Essence*, 10 (December, 1979): 112, 115, 117.

39. Cedric McClester, *Kwanzaa: Everything You Always Wanted to Know But Didn't Know Where to Ask* (New York, 1985); David A. Anderson, *Kwanzaa: An Everyday Resource and Instructional Guide* (New York, 1992).

40. Ysamu Flores-Pena and Robin Evanchuk, "Kwanzaa: The Emergence of an African-American holiday," *Western Folklore*, 56 (Summer, 1997): 281-294.

41. *Atlanta Daily World* (24 December 1978), p. 7; *Chicago Defender* (31 January 1983), p. 5; Lesley Crosson, "A New Leaf," *New York Amsterdam News* (5 January 1974), D-7; *The First Book of Kwanza* (Brooklyn, N.Y., 1977); *St. Louis Argus* (22 December 1977), p. 2. A widely adopted U.S. history textbook described permanent changes wrought by black cultural nationalism of the 1960s. Among the changes was that "the traditional African holiday Kwanzaa began to replace Christmas as a seasonal family celebration." John Mack Faragher, Mari Jo Buhle, Daniel Czitrom, Susan H. Armitage, *Out of Many: A History of the American People*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J., 1997), p. 29.

42. For an example of a Kwanzaa manual that fails to credit Karenga with the creation of Kwanzaa, see The Kwanzaa Celebrants, *The Kwanza Handbook* (Palo Alto, Calif., 1977).

43. Frank White III, "The New Soul Christmas," *Ebony*, xxxix (December, 1983): 29-32.

44. *Atlanta Daily World* (24 December 1978), p. 7.

45. Desda Moss, "A special celebration," *Ladies' Home Journal*, 111 (December, 1994), p. 95.

46. When two folklorists handed out a questionnaire to about fifty blacks in Los Angeles in 1997, they found that 69 percent of those who filled it out were women. They inferred that women were the major organizers of Kwanzaa, and those most interested in it as a form of family celebration. Flores-Pena and Evanchuk, "Kwanzaa," pp. 293-294.

47. "Celebrate in Holiday Style," *Essence*, 20 (December, 1989): 50-58.

48. Anderson, *Kwanzaa*, p. 56.

49. Marilyn Bailey, "Kwanzaa: Afro-American Holiday Evolves," *Oakland Tribune* (26 December 1982), pp. E1, E5.

50. "Kwanzaa," *Afro-American* (28 December 1985), p. 4. See also Eric V. Copage, *Kwanzaa: An African American Celebration of Culture and Cooking* (New York, 1991), p. xxii.

51. Bart Landry's definition of the middle class is very spacious, and includes blacks in sales and clerical work as well as small business owners, administrators, and professionals. He even rejects the notion that there is a black upper class. Bart Landry, *The New Black Middle Class* (Berkeley, Calif., 1987), pp. 185, 221. Income figures are from U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Money Income of Households, Families, and Persons in the United States: 1987*, P60-162 (Washington, D.C., 1993), B-3, B-4. For a cultural and social history of the black middle class, see Charles Pete T. Banner-Haley, *The Fruits of Integration: Black Middle-Class Ideology and Culture, 1960-1990* (Oxford, Miss., 1994); Judith Waldrop, "Happy Kwanzaa," *American Demographics*, 16 (December, 1994): 4. Journalist Leon Dash interviewed Rosa Lee Cunningham, an African American grandmother living in Washington, D.C. beginning in 1987. She and her family were members of the "underclass," drug dependent, unemployed, and on welfare. No member of her family celebrated Kwanzaa. Her son, Alvin, had escaped from the family's poverty and become a bus driver. He had heard of Kwanzaa but did not celebrate it. Interview with Leon Dash, 9 May 1999. Leon Dash, *Rosa Lee: A Mother and Her Family in Urban America* (New York, 1997).

52. Stephan Thernstrom and Abigail Thernstrom, *America in Black and White: One Nation, Indivisible* (New York, 1977), p. 200. The Thernstroms review occupational, educational, and economic progress of the black middle class in chapter seven of their book, pp. 183–202.

53. Skye Dent, "Kwanzaa: A Black Holiday of Unity," *The Oakland Tribune* (27 December 1984), B1.

54. For an example of a black father who rediscovers Kwanzaa as a means of imparting racial heritage to a child, see Eric V. Copage, *Kwanzaa*, p. xiv.

55. Jennifer L. Hochschild, *Facing Up to the American Dream: Race, Class, and the Soul of the Nation* (Princeton, N.J., 1995), pp. 72–90, 267–270; Luke S. Tripp, *Black Student Activists: Transition to Middle Class Professionals* (Lanham, Md., 1987), pp. 58–61.

56. *Regents of University of California v. Bakke*, 483 U.S. 265, 311–313 (1978).

57. Joe R. Feagin and Melvin Sikes, *Living with Racism: The Black Middle-Class Experience* (Boston, 1994), pp. 326–327.

58. Maulana Ron Karenga, "Which Road: Nationalism, Pan-African Socialism?" *The Black Scholar*, 5 (October, 1974): 25.

59. Helen Bradley Griebel, "The West African Origin of the African-American Headwrap," in *Dress and Ethnicity: Change Across Space and Time*, ed. Joanne B. Eicher (Oxford, 1995), pp. 207–224.

60. Herbert J. Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2 (1979): 1–20.

61. For the embrace of consumer culture among Jewish immigrants in the early twentieth century, see Andrew R. Heinze, *Adapting to Abundance: Jewish Immigrants, Mass Consumption, and the Search for American Identity* (New York, 1990); Jenna Weissman Joselit, *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture, 1880–1950* (New York, 1994).

62. Waldrop, "Happy Kwanzaa," p. 4.

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