



THE PEOPLE REMEMBER

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ILLUSTRATED BY
LOVE IS WISE

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For Abadai, Bahati, and Zuberi:
You are your ancestors' wildest dreams
—I.Z.

For my Beloved ancestors,
who imagined all that we could be,
and for them, I'll keep dreaming
—L.W.



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First Edition





AUTHOR'S NOTE

I WAS BORN IN HAITI and immigrated to America as a child. My husband's parents are from Trinidad and Liberia and he was born in America—so our three children represent the African diaspora. They are Caribbean, West African, and African American. Celebrating Kwanzaa every year helps us to combine all these identities into one collective purpose.


Kwanzaa is celebrated for seven days starting December 25, on Christmas, through January 1, New Year's Day. First created in 1966 as a response to the many injustices faced by Black people in America and all over the world, Kwanzaa celebrates African American identity and purpose through its seven principles known as the Nguzo Saba. Kwanzaa is derived from the Swahili phrase “matunda ya kwanza,” which means “first fruits,” and Nguzo Saba, the “seven pillars.”

I first started celebrating Kwanzaa in college. My professors were part of the civil rights movement and had witnessed some of the terrible racial violence that took place in our country in the sixties and seventies. Many of them recognized the need for Black people to create a collective identity and a sense of purpose through a yearly celebration. When I learned the seven principles of Kwanzaa and their meanings, they helped me find connection to my own ancestral history. I continued to celebrate Kwanzaa with friends, and, when I became a mother, I shared the principles with my family.

Before the first day of Kwanzaa, we set up the candleholder, or the kinara. There are seven candles, or mishumaa saba, one for each principle: Three red ones, three green ones, and one black one in the center to represent the first principle, Umoja, meaning “unity.” The kinara is placed on a mat called the mkeka along with a cup of water called the unity cup, or kikombe cha umoja. A bowl of fruits and vegetables represents the crops during harvest, or the mazao. There are ears of corn, muhindi, to represent the children in the family. This is the Kwanzaa altar. There are also gifts set on or around the altar to share with members of the family, especially the children, on each day of Kwanzaa. These gifts are called zawadi.

On each day of Kwanzaa, we greet each other by asking, “Habari gani?,” which means “What’s the news?” in Swahili. We respond with the principle for that day. For example, on December 25, if I ask you, “Habari gani?,” you respond by saying, “Umoja!”

Each principle is paired with an affirmation, and on every day of Kwanzaa, a candle is lit, starting with the black one for unity, while both the principle and its meaning are recited. We alternate between the red and green candles for each principle:



UMOJA (oo-MOE-jah) - *Unity*: To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation, and race.

KUJICHAGULIA (koo-jee-chagoo-LEE-ah) - *Self-determination*: To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves, and speak for ourselves.

UJIMA (oo-JEE-mah) - *Collective work and responsibility*: To build and maintain our community together and make our brothers' and sisters' problems our problems and solve them together.

UJAMAA (oo-JAH-mah) - *Cooperative economics*: To build and maintain our own stores, shops, and other businesses and to benefit from their profits together.


NIA (nee-AH) - *Purpose*: To make our collective vocation the building and development of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.

KUUMBA (koo-OOM-bah) - *Creativity*: To always do as much as we can, however we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it.

IMANI (ee-MAH-nee) - *Faith*: To believe with all our heart in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders, and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.

KWANZAA is also a time to honor history and to remember the sacrifices of those who came before us. On each day of Kwanzaa, I read books with my family and friends; however, I've always wanted there to be one book that both celebrates the principles of Kwanzaa and tells the story of Africans in America as a lyrical narrative, like a song or long poem that can be shared throughout the year, and every year. This is how the idea for *The People Remember* was born.

The People Remember tells the journey of African descendants in America. It begins in Africa, where families were torn apart during the transatlantic slave trade. I call this a time of war. People from different parts of West Africa were taken from their homes and families. They belonged to villages and communities and some from entire nations such as the Yoruba people and the Ashanti people. These Africans spoke different languages and had different customs. Yet, they were bound and chained and forced onto ships sailing to the New World, where they formed bonds that enabled them to work together and fight for their freedom. All these people from different African nations had to learn one common language and create a culture that combined their memories of home in Africa with new traditions that allowed them to survive and thrive. *The People Remember* is about survival as well as the many moments of joy, celebration, and innovation.





TIMELINE OF EVENTS

1518–1853

THE TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

The transatlantic slave trade is one of the greatest atrocities in the world's history. Millions of Africans were captured and sold to Europeans from Portugal, Great Britain, France, and Spain. African people had their own customs and traditions, and many belonged to independent nation states. Those who were kidnapped and enslaved had to adapt to the customs of the Europeans and faced harsh treatment in the New World—the Americas, which included Brazil, North and South America, and the Caribbean. The first ship carrying enslaved Africans arrived in America in 1619 along the shores of Jamestown, Virginia. In 1808, the United States banned the importation of enslaved Africans; however, the illegal transportation of human cargo persisted and slavery continued to thrive. There were many uprisings and movements calling for the end of slavery around the world and in the United States, including the abolitionist movement, during which Sojourner Truth traveled across the country, selling her portraits to support the cause, and gave her most famous speech, "Ain't I A Woman." Harriet Tubman was an enslaved woman who led others to free states in the North through the Underground Railroad. Nat Turner led a rebellion in Virginia in 1831.

1861–65

THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

The American Civil War started because the states in the North and the states in the South disagreed on slavery, states' rights, and westward expansion. Eleven Southern states seceded and became known as the Confederacy. Black men volunteered to fight in the Civil War, and, in 1863, the government formed the Bureau of Colored Troops. On January 1 of that year, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation declaring that all enslaved people in the Confederacy were now free. However, slavery continued in the Union states. It was not until December 18, 1865, when the Thirteenth Amendment was adopted into the Constitution that slavery was legally abolished in the United States.

1865–77

THE RECONSTRUCTION ERA

The Reconstruction era marked the end of the Civil War and the rebuilding and reunification of the states under one union. There were four million African Americans who were freed and had no resources to start their new lives. The government under President Andrew Johnson's leadership had to figure out how to integrate them into society.

Many African Americans traveled between states in search of loved ones who had been sold or had run away to Northern states. The Reconstruction Act of 1867 allowed Black people to be elected into the U.S. Congress—many of whom ran and won seats. The ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment granted freed Black men the right to vote.

1877–1916

SEPARATE BUT (UN)EQUAL

The United States was now faced with what Black scholars called “The Negro Problem.” A book of the same title was edited by Booker T. Washington and included essays by W. E. B. Du Bois. They were two of the leading voices addressing the social status of Black Americans. Although they strongly disagreed on methods, Washington and Du Bois both believed that Black Americans should work toward establishing their own societies where they could build wealth despite the persistence of racial segregation in the form of Jim Crow laws. In 1896, *Plessy v. Ferguson* upheld the “separate but equal” doctrine that allowed states to legally separate Blacks and whites. Racial violence persisted under this law as whites suppressed the freedom of Black people.

1916–70

THE GREAT MIGRATION


Black people sought refuge from racial violence and segregation in the South and trailed to Northern

cities in search of jobs and a better life. This was called the Great Migration, and it continued for several decades as the demand for racial equality heightened during the civil rights movement. Black men also enlisted and fought in the First and Second World Wars, including the Tuskegee Airmen, the first Black military aviators in the U.S. Army Air Corps. However, migrants from the South and veterans faced just as much racial discrimination and violence in Northern cities. Some neighborhoods in both the South and the North thrived because of Black-owned businesses, such as in the Greenwood District (known as “Black Wall Street”), in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and in Harlem in New York City, where the Harlem Renaissance took place. In other parts of the country, Black families who were able to afford homes in white neighborhoods faced discriminatory practices by mortgage lenders, forcing them to buy homes only in certain areas. This is known as redlining, which keeps home values in Black neighborhoods low and prevents Black homeowners from building wealth.

1950s–68

THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

In 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white passenger on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. She was arrested and taken into custody by the police, and this sparked a citywide bus boycott organized by Dr. King. The Montgomery bus boycott led to a number of protests across the country,



especially following the murder of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till in August of that same year by white men in Money, Mississippi. Emmett Till's murder and Rosa Parks's arrest marked the beginning of the civil rights movement, which advocated for voting rights, equality, and an end to segregation. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 prohibited racial discrimination in voting.

1965–89

THE BLACK POWER MOVEMENT

The assassinations of Malcolm X in 1965 and Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968 gave rise to politically charged Black expression in the form of literature, poetry, music, theater, fashion, and fine art. Black people aimed to make connections with decolonization movements in Africa as well as adopt aesthetics that instilled pride like afros, cornrows, and dashikis. This era in American history was called the Black Arts Movement. In 1966, Bobby Seale and Dr. Huey P. Newton founded the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, and in just a few short years it gained a nationwide following. The organization is credited for starting the Free Breakfast for School Children Program. The Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was another organization that grew out of the civil rights movement, and as more racial violence continued to plague the United States, some members moved away from nonviolent protest and leaned toward the

earlier teachings of Malcolm X, who advocated for self-defense. Stokely Carmichael (who later changed his name to Kwame Ture) first chanted the phrase “Black Power” during a 1966 march in Mississippi. “Black Power” became the rallying cry for activists who advocated for self-sufficiency through Black-owned bookstores, printing presses, and schools. This later became known as the Black Power movement, and it lasted through the 1970s, taking on different forms until 1989, when Black Panther Party cofounder Dr. Newton was killed. However, many of the political ideals of the Black Power movement continue today in other calls for change, especially the Black Lives Matter movement.

1977–PRESENT THE HIP-HOP ERA

From the transatlantic slave trade through slavery and the Great Migration, Black people brought with them their culture, their family traditions, and their music. The drum was a major part of many African traditions; however, drums were outlawed in the South during slavery. Plantation owners feared that enslaved Black people would use the drums to communicate with one another. Still, Black people celebrated with music and dance by using their hands, feet, bodies, and voices as instruments. Song and movement traditions such as spirituals, the blues, the ring shout, and the cakewalk served as foundations for Black music and dance. Gospel and

jazz birthed the Motown sound in the 1950s and '60s, just as funk and the poets of the Black Arts Movement birthed hip-hop in the late 1970s. Major cities in the United States such as New York, Chicago, and Detroit were recovering from years of civil unrest in the form of riots following the death of Dr. King. Unemployment and poverty led to high crime rates and violence in these cities. But even in the midst of disenfranchisement, children were continuing to celebrate life through music and dance. One form of music evolved out of mixing vinyl disco records on a turntable to create a break beat. Someone would rap over that break beat, and this is how hip-hop was born in the South Bronx neighborhood of New York City. The Hip-Hop Movement continues to be the voice of young people all over the world.

2008–16 THE FIRST BLACK PRESIDENT

In 2008, Barack Hussein Obama became the first Black president of the United States. This historic moment instilled a sense of great pride for Black people all over the world. Michelle Obama, a prominent lawyer, became the first Black first lady and together with their daughters, Sasha and Malia Obama, they resided in the White House for two terms, or eight years.

2012–PRESENT THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT

In July 2012, seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin was shot and killed in Florida by George Zimmerman, who claimed to be acting as a member of a community watch group. Zimmerman was acquitted of all charges the following year, which led to a wave of protests across the country. Many people also expressed outrage on social media, notably Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi, and Alicia Garza, who used the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. This hashtag became a national movement when Cullors, Tometi, and Garza turned it into an organization of activists who strategize locally within a nonhierarchical structure—meaning there aren't any Black Lives Matter leaders. As racial violence continues to occur in big cities and small towns all over the United States, including the murders of Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, and Eric Garner, the rallying cry for protests in the streets and on social media continues to be Black Lives Matter. In 2020, in the midst of a global pandemic and as a response to the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, protesters continued to march, artists continued to make music, writers and poets continued to speak truth to power, and more and more children began to learn about the history, the resilience, the brilliance, and the importance of all Black lives.



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