

A Series: THE BLACK FAMILY AND THE CHALLENGES OF THE 80's

SPECIAL: REFLECTING AT CHRISTMASTIME — "YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW"

by Maudra Jones

"TO GOD BE THE GLORY . . ."

What has become my own continual search for meanings in the history of my people led me to examine the meanings which the season called "Christmas" holds for the traditional Christian Black American family. As I reflect on my early experiences, warm memories of a celebration of family life are filled with expressions of love, joy, anticipation, laughter and good tidings. I recall the days in a little town called Ironton, where my grandmother lived. It was our family homestead — and every Christmas was a celebration of family life, a family reunion. In those days, Christmastime was truly a time of reaffirming the love, unity and strength of the family.

The anticipation came with the early planning for that joyous day and continued to mount as we took the 30-mile drive from New Orleans to Ironton. (I remember an old friend who teased

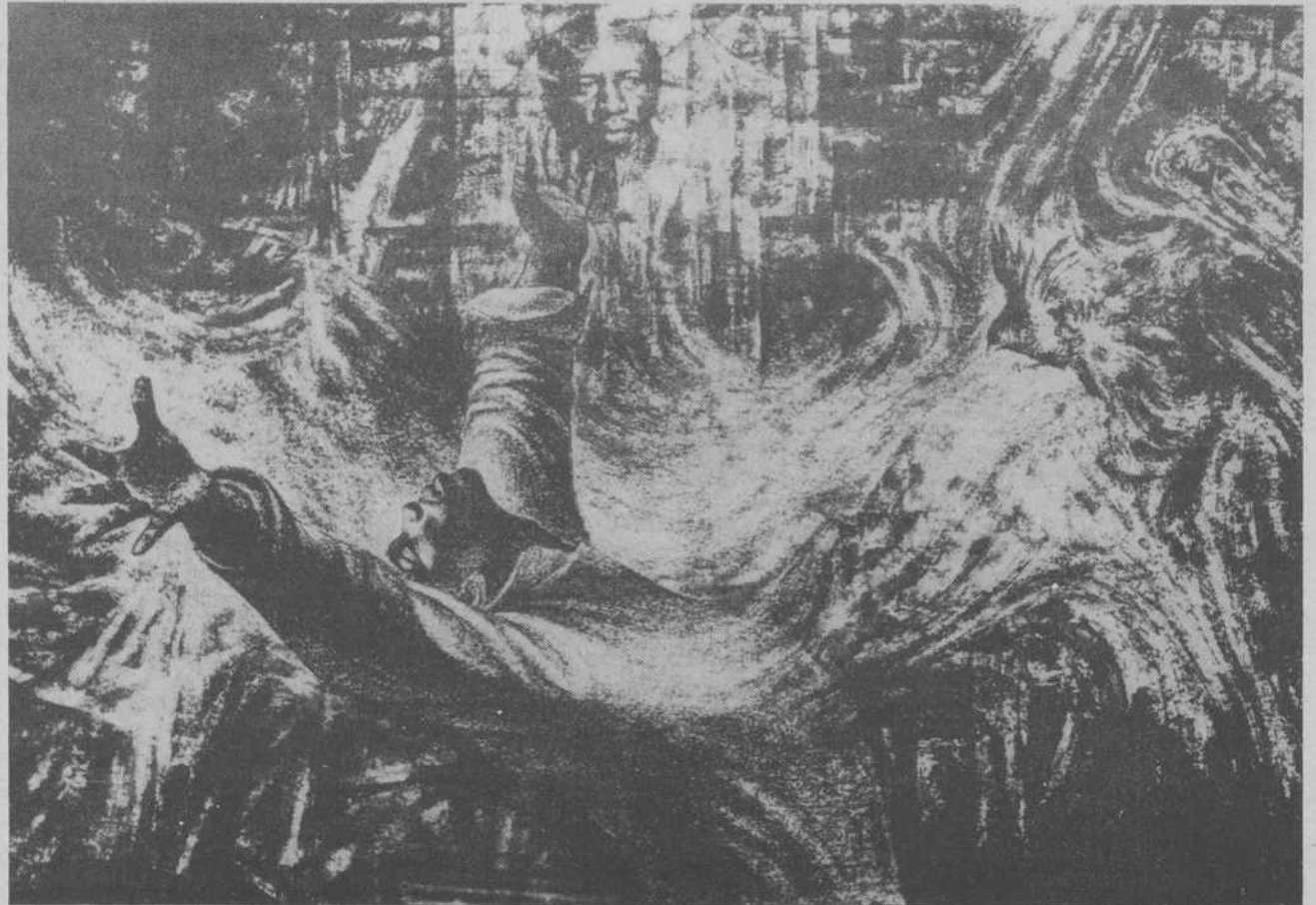
about the size of the town, calling it "Ironing Board Town"); I didn't mind the teasing, because I knew that there were a lot of treasures awaiting me in "Ironing Board Town." I often wondered why mama baked so many pies and cakes; and why (for this one meal), in addition to the traditional turkey and trimmings, there was ham, pork roast, rabbit, "pull-do" (that was the name of a bird which I never learned to spell, but loved to eat), chicken, homemade breads and candies, wines and brandies — all of which, however, was gone by the time the "crowd" made its last "round." That was the way it was — every family in that little town, along with all their visiting relatives and friends, "made the rounds" to every home to celebrate Christmas Day — eating, drinking, singing their favorite spirituals and blues, sharing all the blessings of life and basking in the

beauty of God's creations — renewing the unity and strength of the beautiful Black families in "Ironing Board Town."

America in the early 70's. The meanings of "KWAANZA" are clearly a rededication of those virtues and values that

one looks at what the Bible really says, it is apparent that there are major discrepancies between the birth of Jesus

forces which serve to "harden our hearts" and allow us to stray from the "goal toward which all creation moves."



Nite Tinner: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow, nite, 1968, from the "I Have a Dream Series"

Charles White

Christmas Eve

*While walking down the street
last nite, I watched a little boy
his face against a window
for a while, he was looking at toys.*

*I tapped him on his shoulder
light, and when he turned around
I saw his little colored face
he smiled and said; Yes Mam . . .*

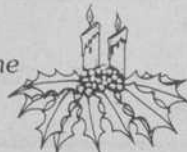
*He said to me, your hands are white . . .
I said to him, your hands are warm . . .
and when I asked, where is your Mom?
He said to me, my Mom is gone.*

*I took his hand and walked
last nite, into the big bright store.
I spent on him the money I had
for my own Christmas joy.*

*I took him to his dad
last nite, we had to walk a mile.
He had his Santa on Christmas Eve,
I remember his smile.*

*After I left him I went home,
no one waited for me.
But, believe me, I'm not alone
I have his smile with me.*

by Nela Geram



I have since learned, from African friends, that we were carrying on an old African tradition in that Louisiana town, like in many other towns across the country.

In many ways, for me, those are the "gone years"; for the folk in "Ironing Board Town," they are the "now years," though many of the old ones, like my grandmother, have gone to rest.

Christmas will always hold those precious meanings for me, as for many others who were privileged to experience this "triumph of the human spirit" and who strive to keep some semblance of it alive in a world which becomes more and more dehumanizing. It was perhaps that destructive tide of dehumanization that Ron Karenga set out to stem when he introduced "KWAANZA" to the Black families of

are lasting and strengthening — that only the human heart can comprehend and bring to bear on those forces that would destroy the spiritual and moral foundations of a people weary of struggle and caught up in a tide which is not their own.

Now, in 1983, as I think about what the "Christmas Story" represents in America, I understand what the young poet in his work titled "Me and Santa." This stinging commentary on the commercialization of Christmas was published in Ruby Dee's book "Glow Child," almost a decade ago. In my quest for truth, during the years that followed, I learned that the Bible does not record the actual birth of Christ. It does, however, speak in terms that clearly indicate Christ was not born in the winter. As stated by one writer: ". . . When

as described in the Bible and the Christmas story so familiar to the world." There is an interesting account of such discrepancies, supported by scripture, in the November - December, 1983 issue of "The Plain Truth Magazine," published by the Worldwide Church of God in Pasadena, Calif. In an examination of the meaning of Christmas, as recorded in any major encyclopedia, one will discover that Christmas is described as a man-made event, with no Biblical references — startling to most, but true — indeed, a living testimony of the

In the final analysis, each must find his/her own meanings for Christmas, just as each must develop his/her own personal relationship with God. As I grow in the knowledge of God's word, the "Christmas" I have learned to cherish as a "celebration of family life" becomes more and more an expression of obedience, praise and thanksgiving to the giver of life. On that deeper level, apart from all the commercialism and discrepancies, "Christmas" and any other celebration of life means giving God the glory.

"GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST AND ON EARTH PEACE, GOODWILL TOWARD ALL MEN!"

LUKE 2:13-14

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