

Karenga: Rethink Kwanzaa stamp

By Dr. Conrad Worrill
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Dear Maulana Karenga, I hope you and members of the US Organization are doing well.

After several months of discussion, dialogue and exchange within the National Black United Front (NBUF) and our extended movement network, we decided at our St. Louis Central Committee Meeting last September to publicly oppose the United States Postal Service unveiling of the new Kwanzaa stamp that you have endorsed. We also support the position that the National Elders Leadership Council has taken in opposition to the new Kwanzaa stamp.

There are many reasons why NBUF is opposed to this new Kwanzaa stamp.

First, the concept of Kwanzaa as we historically have understood it and helped develop it, over the last 30 years, is a cultural project that strikes at the roots of Black power. That is the ability of a people to define themselves in the context of their own experiences. The idea of defining ourselves in our own image and interests is at the heart of the Black Nationalist Movement out of which

Analysis

Kwanzaa developed.

Obviously, we have an ideological and philosophical difference. It has not been our objective over the many years of helping to develop Kwanzaa, defend it, you and the US Organization's contribution in bringing Kwanzaa before the public, to now acquiesce to the attempts of outside forces to dilute its original meaning and take it over.

We never sought to gain the legitimacy of White institutions or corporations in our efforts to help develop Kwanzaa. We only sought to get the legitimacy and support of African people in this country.

We always participated in Kwanzaa as Black Nationalists, who saw this holiday celebration as a step in helping African people in America fulfill the desire to be an united people, with a common set of goals and objectives for freedom, independence and liberation.

Secondly, we have always understood Kwanzaa to be a celebration of "family, community and culture." Now

that Kwanzaa is being widely accepted in the marketplace as a major cultural institution in the African community in America, there are forces outside of our community who not only want to distort and dilute its meaning, but to commercially profit from its popularity.

We have always fought to maintain the cultural integrity of Kwanzaa. We have always taken a position that Kwanzaa is not the kind of African celebration in America that should be sold to corporate America or one that needs the endorsement of public governmental agencies like the U.S. Postal Service.

What we have learned through our investigation of the United States Postal Service's unveiling of the new Kwanzaa stamp is that corporations can buy licensing rights to use the image of any stamp released by the Service for merchandising or promotional campaigns. It is our position that these licensing arrangements pose the biggest commercial threat to Kwanzaa. This mechanism gives

corporations, who have bought a license, the legal right to use the stamp's image anyway they want.

In addition, we have discovered that the U.S. Postal Service will be selling pre-paid phone cards, greeting cards, lapel pins (made in China) and bookmarks with the Kwanzaa stamp image on them during the dedication ceremonies to announce the unveiling of the new stamp throughout the country.

Maulana, in a statement you released a few years ago, you said "... we live in a capitalist society which commoditizes all things, including women's wombs. It has commercialized Christmas, Hanukkah, beginning its campaign for Christmas a full month before the holiday."

You said, "The challenge for the African in American community, having learned especially the lessons of Christmas, is to refuse to cooperate with the drive to make Kwanzaa another week to shop rather than what it is."

Maulana, we feel in your endorsement of the new Kwanzaa stamp that you have not been accountable to the Black Nationalist Movement



in this country who helped organize and build Kwanzaa to the stature that it has today.

Kwanzaa belongs to the movement, not just you and the US Organization. You made unilateral decisions to enter into your arrangement with U.S. Postal Service. You might say you have a right to make these kind of arrangements as one of the creators of Kwanzaa, but we have a right to challenge your decision as major organizers in the Kwanzaa movement.

Finally, there are many people in the movement who are disturbed by your reordering of the colors — the red, black and green — on our flag. Not only have you reordered the colors, but you have redefined what was given to us on Aug. 1, 1920 before 25,000 African people who were participating in the first Universal Negro Improvement

Association (UNIA) Convention under the leadership of the Honorable Marcus Garvey. These colors of the red, black and green and its meaning is generally accepted by most Black people in America.

Maulana, as you have written and articulated, Kwanzaa is a holiday celebration that gives African people a re-affirmation of our greatness and the potential for continued growth. It is a holiday that gives us a chance to share with our families and loved ones the prospects and future of Black liberation. It gives our children a positive reinforcement in the continuing fight for our people.

I hope you receive our position as we have presented it. Hotep!

(Dr. Worrill is the National Chairman of the National Black United Front.)

Tracey Edmonds serves up her share of 'Soul Food'

By Avonie Brown
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Since its opening in late September, audiences have been feasting on "Soul Food" and their appetite has not been satiated as they still keep going back for more.

To date the film has grossed more than \$40 million dollars nationwide. In its impressive debut weekend its \$11.2 million gross revenue was second only to Steven Spielberg's "The Peacemaker," which earned \$12.3 million. However, according to figures released that chart box office receipts, while the "Peacemaker" opened in 2,362 theaters nationwide and averaged \$5,213 per screen, "Soul Food" was screened in 1,339 theaters with a convincing \$8,363 per screen average.

Yet the "Soul Food" phenomenon does not stop there. The accompanying soundtrack has already gone platinum with over one million units sold.

It has had two songs hit the Top 20—"What About Us" by Total and "I Care 'Bout You" by Milestone. Dru Hill's "We're Not Making Love No More" is currently being played in heavy rotation; "A Song For Mama," the title track by Boyz II Men, is the next single to be released and the musical earth-goddess Erykah Badu just completed directing the music video for "In Due Time" by

Outkast with Cee-Lo.

Not since the success of "Waiting to Exhale" (earning \$67 million) has a movie reverberated throughout the Black community with the same emotional intensity as "Soul Food" has done. One of the major players behind the project's success is Tracey Edmonds.

"We really had no idea what numbers "Soul Food" was gonna do. No idea," Edmonds said. "We hoped people would come out that opening weekend and understand its importance to the longevity of a film, and we were indeed very blessed from the opening. And after that the word of mouth kind of spread. Sure, we hoped and pray that it would be commercially successful but at the end of the day the one thing that we were really proud of was that we had put together a quality film."

The 30-year-old Californian is the president and CEO of Yab Yum Entertainment and Edmonds Entertainment. Yab Yum (the Japanese God of love), is a subsidiary of Sony Music. Initially a publishing company that contributed songs to such multi-platinum artists as Toni Braxton, TLC and Michael Jackson, Yab Yum is now expanding its own roster of recording artists.

Edmonds' first foray into the movie industry was producing the music score for



Tracey Edmonds chills with her husband Babyface.

"Tuesday Morning Ride," the only Black film nominated for an Oscar in 1996. This initial success inspired Edmonds and husband, Kenneth "Babyface" Edmonds, to launch Edmonds Entertainment, the production company responsible for "Soul Food."

Edmonds explained that Yab Yum was initially approached to put together a soundtrack for the project to add to its marketability to the

major Hollywood studios who had all rejected the script by writer/director George Tillman, Jr.

"Unfortunately a lot of studios initially passed up on the film because it didn't have your typical urban film formula: It was missing the drugs, the violence, the gangsters and the ghettos. But when I read the script I immediately wanted to become attached to it as a producer.

Kenny and I also thought it would be a great first project for our production company," explained Edmonds.

With Babyface signed on as executive producer and Edmonds as one of the film's producers, the table was being set for the making of "Soul Food." After discussions with Tillman and his partner Robert Teitel (with whom she shared

production duties), the project was pitched to 20th Century Fox who immediately gave the go ahead. However, because of pre-existing negotiation issues with Edmonds Entertainment, the studio would not immediately release the funding. Undeterred, the "Soul Food" team began pre-production with their own money.

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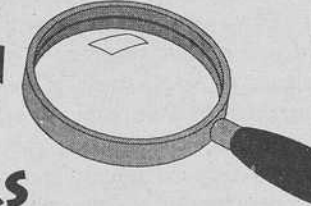
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