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Illinois Wesleyan Celebrates Kwanzaa

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.—Illinois Wesleyan's Office of Multicultural Affairs and the Black Student Union will celebrate Kwanzaa on Dec. 3 at 7 p.m. in the Main Lounge of Memorial Center, 104 E. University St., Bloomington.

Traditional Kwanzaa foods will be offered at the ceremony, which is free and open to the public.

Based on African traditions, Kwanzaa was created in 1966 by Maulana Karenga, professor and chair of the Department of Black Studies at California State University, Long Beach, and executive director of the African American Cultural Center. His ideas for Kwanzaa, a term that comes from the phrase "matunda ya kwanza," which means "first fruits" in Swahili (the most spoken language in Africa), is not a religious celebration, but rather a chance for people to reflect at the end of the year, and look forward to the next year.

The celebration, which serves to build community, enrich African-American consciousness, and reaffirm the value of central grounding for life and struggle, takes place from Dec. 26-Jan. 1, however, Illinois Wesleyan will celebrate the holiday early because students and faculty will be on winter break during this time.

The event will feature drummer Kunama Mtendaji, who will provide African dance and storytelling with audience participation, and IWU students will present the seven principles ("Nguzo Saba"), of Kwanzaa and the lighting of the seven candles ("Mishumaa Saba"). Also during the program, Mtendaji and the music and dance ensemble Afi Ama (Spirits Most Ancient) will perform two pieces in honor of late jazz vocalist, musician and activist singer Nina Simone and Nigerian drummer Babatunde Olatunji. Both artists died earlier this year.

Mtendaji, who has been trained in the folklore of the Afro-Brazilian martial art, capoeira, and stories of Afro-Brazilian settlements such as Palmares, is an African American folk artist who specializes in performing and teaching storytelling, music, and dance. He performs solo

and also coordinates Afi Ama; The Mask Dance Society, A.F.R.I.C.A. (Association For Responsible Interdisciplinary Cultural Artists); and the Missouri African Arts Society. He specializes in drumming and dance styles from Senegal, Gambia, Mali, Ghana, Guinea, and the Ivory Coast.

Karenga, who visited Illinois Wesleyan's third Kwanzaa celebration in 1998, has played a key role in shaping the Black Arts Movement, Black Studies, the Black Power Movement, Black Student Union Movement, Afrocentricity, the independent Black school movement, and Black theological and ethical discourse.