

DENVER CITY COUNCIL



Proclamation No. 26-0197

Proclamation Honoring the African-American Kwanza Tradition in the City and County of Denver

WHEREAS, Kwanzaa is a sacred cultural celebration born from African heritage and stewarded within the African-American community as an intentional affirmation of identity, dignity, and collective memory, guided by the Nguzo Saba — Umoja (Unity), Kujichagulia (Self-Determination), Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility), Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics), Nia (Purpose), Kuumba (Creativity), and Imani (Faith) — principles that call communities to live with purpose, accountability, and cultural pride; and

WHEREAS, since 1968, African-American families in Denver gathered within their homes to rotate nightly Kwanzaa celebrations, transforming living rooms into sacred cultural spaces where education, ritual, storytelling, and ancestral remembrance were lovingly preserved and passed forward; and

WHEREAS, as these gatherings expanded beyond the walls of family homes, Denver's historic Five Points community emerged as a collective sanctuary for celebration — a cultural heartbeat where African-American heritage, artistry, and communal responsibility could flourish in shared space; and

WHEREAS, Denver's Kwanzaa tradition has been shaped by visionary African-American cultural stewards — including nationally acclaimed griot Opalanga Pugh, Ken and Gerri Grimes, Perry Ayers, and generations of elders and organizers — whose leadership safeguarded the integrity of the celebration and ensured its evolution remained rooted in ancestral reverence and community care; and

WHEREAS, Denver's observance is distinguished by enduring cultural expressions that honor creativity and lineage, including Opening Night celebrations at the Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Theater, the nightly lighting of the 12-foot Grande Kinara first constructed in 1991, a Senior Luncheon celebrating elders as living vessels of wisdom, and Opalanga's Big Dance — each ritual reflecting the joy, resilience, and artistic brilliance of African-American cultural life; and

WHEREAS, Denver's Circle of Wisdom stands as a living council of African-American elders inducted each year to embody accountability, affirmation, and guardianship of community well-being, ensuring that cultural leadership remains anchored in lived experience and intergenerational responsibility; and

WHEREAS, Denver's Circle of Ancestors honors those who have transitioned — elders who walked in wisdom during their lifetime or were recognized posthumously — affirming that ancestral presence continues to protect, guide, and spiritually fortify the community through remembrance and ritual; and

WHEREAS, each Kwanzaa gathering in Denver is intentionally curated as a site of cultural education and sacred continuity, where Kwanzaa teachings preserve African-American heritage, libations honor ancestral lineage, and intergenerational experiences center both elders and children as keepers of memory and architects of the future; and

WHEREAS, the City and County of Denver recognizes that this African-American Kwanzaa tradition is not merely a celebration but a living act of cultural preservation, healing, artistry, and collective affirmation — a testament to the enduring strength, creativity, and legacy of African-American community life;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT PROCLAIMED that the Denver City Council proudly honors and affirms the African-American Kwanzaa tradition carried in the City and County of Denver since 1969, recognizing the generations of families, elders, artists, educators, and cultural stewards whose devotion has sustained this sacred observance.

BE IT FURTHER PROCLAIMED that the Denver City Council expresses profound gratitude and reverence for the Denver Kwanzaa Committee, Denver's Circle of Wisdom, and the Circle of Ancestors, whose leadership and ancestral presence continue to guide this living tradition.

BE IT FURTHER PROCLAIMED that the City and County of Denver acknowledges Kwanzaa as a powerful expression of African-American heritage, resilience, and communal responsibility, and celebrates the values it embodies as pillars of cultural continuity and civic vitality.

PASSED BY THE COUNCIL February 23, 2026

Signed by:

Amanda P. Sandeval

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PRESIDENT

