

Written by Linda Tarrant-Reid  
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Good-bye 2011 and hello 2012! As I greet friends, family members and strangers with the familiar "Happy New Year," I say it with more conviction and more intention than I ever have before, because I truly wish for everyone a safer, happier, healthier and more prosperous 2012.

As Kwanzaa celebrations came to a close this holiday season, we were left to contemplate and incorporate the Seven Principles of the holiday, the inspiring Nguzo Saba, into our hectic lives – Umoja (Unity), Kujichagulia (Self-Determination), Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility), Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics), Nia (Purpose), Kuumba (Creativity), and Imani (Faith). In Dr. Maulana Karenga's Annual Founder's Message published in the December 22, 2011 Los Angeles Sentinel, he summarized the Seven Principles and their relationship to where we are today – "walk gently, act justly and relate rightly in and for the world."

Dr. Karenga noted the 45th anniversary of Kwanzaa, and focused his message on the work that must be done, not just in the African American community, but in the global community. He

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wrote of the "oppression imposed on human beings" and the "injury and injustice inflicted on the earth."

Last January we witnessed the beginning of a paradigm shift in the Arab world with the overthrow of Mubarak, the February revolt in Libya which climaxed with the death of Muammar Gaddafi in October, and more unrest and protests in Iran, Bahrain, Yemen, Iraq and Syria and in cities across the Middle East in 2011 dubbed the "Arab Spring." The assassination of Osama Bin Laden by United States' Navy Seals in Abbottabad, Pakistan in May ended the nearly ten-year search for the mastermind behind the worst terrorist attack on U.S. soil. The collective voice of the people in these countries is protesting a variety of social and political conditions including dictatorships, distribution of wealth, corruption, unemployment, and human rights violations. They are seeking change and are achieving it in many instances.

With the fluid geopolitical landscape came extreme geophysical changes as well. Quakes, tsunamis, floods, hurricanes and extreme weather became common occurrences in the U.S. and abroad in 2011. The East Coast experienced an uncharacteristic 5.8 magnitude earthquake and Hurricane Irene in the same week. The Midwest floods and tornadoes devastated communities and the Southwest suffered through a drought. Extreme heat in the dog days of July and August set records from Oklahoma to Newark, New Jersey. According to climatologists these changes were due to La Nina, a Pacific Ocean weather anomaly that when paired with global warming, causes extreme weather events.

One of the most extreme disasters occurred in March 2011 on Japan's northeast coast when an earthquake that measured 9 on the Richter scale struck, making it the strongest quake in Japanese history. The quake triggered a massive tsunami and the world's worst nuclear crisis in 25 years, when its nuclear reactors cracked causing a meltdown and leaking radiation. It is estimated that 23,000 died and/or were reported missing as a result of the triple disaster.

As we begin 2012, it is important to reflect on what has happened this past year, but it is also imperative to figure out how we are going to greet the future, which will determine outcomes for us, our families and the world community. Natural disasters may not be something we can control, but we certainly can educate ourselves and our children on sustainability, protecting and preserving our precious resources – clean water, clean air, trees, plants, ecosystems, and ourselves by being prepared. The sluggish economy, at home and abroad, has made us more resourceful and also more aware of how we can effect change. One response was Occupy Wall Street, a worldwide movement that has put the issue of economic inequity center stage.

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As we celebrate the achievements of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. this month, remembrances of the sacrifices individuals made 50 years ago including the Freedom Riders who desegregated restaurants and waiting rooms at bus terminals in the South in 1961 and the Taylor Case, the first school desegregation case filed in the North, also in 1961, are still fresh memories making us mindful of our collective and continuing struggle.

In his December 10, 1964 Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech in Oslo, Norway, Dr. Martin Luther King spoke about the future, "I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality.... I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality."

Let us not tuck in or bury our heads in the sand avoiding life's challenges, let us stand up and walk toward the future with optimism and intention that this will be a good year. Happy 2012!

*Linda Tarrant-Reid is an author, historian and photographer. Her book *Discovering Black America: From the Age of Exploration to the Twenty-First Century* will be published in September 2012. Visit her blog at, [www.discoverblackus.wordpress.com](http://www.discoverblackus.wordpress.com). Send your comments to Linda Tarrant-Reid, c/o The Westchester County Press, P.O. Box 152, White Plains, NY 10602.*