

THE SUN RISES IN THE

EAST



▶ 035

▶ 034

DISCUSSION & ACTIVITY GUIDE

WHAT'S INSIDE

- 2** **How to Use This Discussion Guide**
- 3** **The Film in Context**
- 5** **Vocabulary**
- 6** **Nguzo Saba**
- 7** **Suggested Pre-Film Discussion**
- 8** **Part 1: Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility)**
Exercise: Group Poem
- 9** **Part 2: Nia (Purpose)**
Exercise: Past and Present
- 10** **Part 3: Kuumba (Creativity)**
- 11** **Part 4: Umoja (Unity)**
- 12** **Exercise: Social Justice Now**
- 13** **Exercise: Making a Protest Sign**
- 14** **Part 5: Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics)**
- 15** **Part 6: Toolbox for Telling Stories**
- 16** **Extension Activity: Local Oral History**
- 17** **Resources**
Credits
- 18** **About the Filmmakers**



034



035



036



HOW TO USE THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE

This discussion guide contains an introduction to *The Sun Rises in The East*, an explanation of the film's historical context, a breakdown of key vocabulary, a suggested pre-film discussion, six sections (some of which correspond to the seven **Nguzo Saba** principles), and an extension activity which can be used in a research assignment. The suggested discussion questions consist of prompts intended to promote critical thinking, reflection, social-emotional learning and community building.

ABOUT THE FILM

The Sun Rises in The East is a documentary exploring the legacy of The East, a pan-African cultural organization founded in 1969 by Black teachers and students in Brooklyn, NY.

The documentary traces the organization's roots to New York City's 1968 community control experiment, in which members of the predominantly Black Brooklyn neighborhoods of Ocean Hill-Brownsville were given decision-making power in their children's education, from school curriculum to the hiring of teachers. In response, New York's United Federation of Teachers launched a citywide strike, eventually ending the experiment in community control. Young Black teachers, high school students and recent graduates subsequently sought to create their own institutions outside of the system.

Naming themselves The East, this organized group of young people launched a series of classes that grew into the the Uhuru Sasa Shule (Kiswahili for "Freedom Now School"). They further created more than a dozen institutions and businesses, including a performance venue where they hosted world-famous jazz musicians and poets of the Black Arts Movement, a food co-op, a newsmagazine, a record label, a restaurant, a bookstore, a clothing shop and more. The East also served as a meeting place for political groups across the country and world.

The Sun Rises in The East compellingly weaves interviews with former East members, archival footage, photographs, newspapers and other documents to piece together the organization's birth, rise and decline. It emphasizes the legacy of Black nation-building and the enduring importance of The East's message of Black self-determination in today's world.



THE FILM IN CONTEXT

The East was a pan-African organization comprised of more than a dozen businesses and institutions, including a school, a performance venue, a food co-op, a bookstore and a newsmagazine. The organization was founded in Brooklyn, NY, in 1969 at a transformative moment for Africans and African-descended people in the United States. On the continent of Africa, colonized nations were advancing courageous liberation struggles to gain their independence. In the United States, the civil rights movement of the 1960s gave way to the Black Power movement in which The East took part, influencing the cultural and political life of Black Americans who were also seeking freedom.

The term “Black Power” was brought into the mainstream when Stokely Carmichael (later known as Kwame Ture), a leader in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, became frustrated with Martin Luther King Jr.’s nonviolent philosophy after witnessing police brutality against peaceful protestors. In a 1966 speech at University of California, Berkeley, he declared, “We’ve been saying ‘freedom’ for

six years. What we are going to start saying now is ‘Black Power.’” This shift grew out of an urgent desire for Black **self-determination** — self-reliance and the freedom for Black people to make choices by and for their own community — rather than advocacy for the integration of white and Black communities.

The East was also an essential part of the Black Arts Movement, a term for artists, musicians and poets who were the creative pillars of the Black Power movement. They were also known as “cultural nationalists.” The movement was officially established in 1965 when writer and poet Amiri Baraka opened the Repertory Theater in Harlem. Participants in the Black Arts Movement saw the celebration of Blackness through culture as a way to achieve Black self-determination and political change.

At its height, The East hosted some of the most renowned jazz musicians and poets of its time such as Pharoah Sanders, Sonny Rollins, Gil Scott-Heron, Betty Carter, The

Last Poets, Sonia Sanchez, Yusef Iman, Sun Ra Arkestra, Max Roach and Roy Ayers, among others. The organization also engaged with other political groups such as the Young Lords, the Black Panther Party and the Congress of Afrikan People. It established lasting cultural traditions such as the International African Arts Festival, which still takes place in Brooklyn every summer.

The Black Power philosophy's embrace of African culture led to nationwide demands for Black history to be taught in schools. Community control emerged in New York City to give parents and other community members decision-making power in their children's education, including adopting heritage-oriented curricula. As Segun Shabaka, a leading figure of The East, says in the film, at that time, Central Brooklyn had the highest concentration of Black people after Nigeria and Brazil, making the area a Black micronation.

The legacy of The East still thrives in Central Brooklyn's abundant Black-owned businesses. The contributions of former East members — Lumumba Akinwole-Bande's community organizing, Fela Barclift's preschool, and Dwana Smallwood's performing arts center — are just a few examples of the organization's continued sense of purpose.

Due in part to the fast pace of **gentrification** and the history of **redlining**, the Black population in several Central Brooklyn neighborhoods — including Bedford-Stuyvesant, Crown Heights and parts of Flatbush — declined by 15% or more in the decade between 2010 and 2020.¹ Furthermore, The East forms part of a legacy of independent Black communities which have historically flourished in New York City.

This includes Seneca Village, an enclave destroyed by **eminent domain** to make way for what is now Central Park. Weeksville, a neighborhood in today's Crown Heights, was originally founded in 1838 as a pre-Civil War free Black settlement.

1. https://www.nyc.gov/assets/planning/download/pdf/planning-level/nyc-population/census2020/dcp_2020-census-briefing-booklet-1.pdf



VOCABULARY

NGUZO SABA

The seven principles of the Nguzo Saba were written in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga, a professor at California State University. Dr. Karenga created the principles — part of an African-centered philosophy he developed called Kawaïda — to be celebrated during Kwanzaa, combining traditions of African peoples such as the Ashanti and Zulu.

A celebration of African heritage, each day of Kwanzaa focuses on one particular principle. These guiding principles were an integral part of The East's philosophy. The Nguzo Saba was a set of values for daily life that were used to structure communal relationships and the social justice activism undertaken by the East.

REDLINING

A racist practice implemented in the mid-20th century which prevented people of color from obtaining home mortgages, leading to their inability to buy homes. Meanwhile, the federal government directly subsidized homeownership for white people.

Neighborhoods where Black people and other communities of color lived were deemed “dangerous” for investment, leading to a low rate of home ownership and the proliferation of underserved neighborhoods.

GENTRIFICATION

Occurs when economic change in an underserved neighborhood faces acute demographic change and housing insecurity due to external business ventures. This process is associated with real estate investments which lure high-income residents, raising rental and home costs for existing communities.

Consequently, long-term residents become priced out of their own homes and often do not benefit from new investments such as new businesses, transit, and housing. Such displacement overwhelmingly impacts Black, Indigenous and other people of color.

SELF-DETERMINATION

The ability to fully control all aspects of societal life such as education, cultural institutions and economic empowerment without external interference.

EMINENT DOMAIN

Eminent domain refers to the power of the government to take private property and convert it into public use.²

2. https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/eminent_domain

NGUZO SABA

(THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES)

1. UMOJA

(UNITY)

To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation and race.

2. KUJICHAGULIA

(SELF-DETERMINATION)

To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves.

3. UJIMA

(COLLECTIVE WORK AND RESPONSIBILITY)

To build and maintain our community together and make our brother's and sister's problems our problems and to solve them together.

4. UJAMAA

(COOPERATIVE ECONOMICS)

To build and maintain our own stores, shops and other businesses and to profit from them together.

5. NIA

(PURPOSE)

To make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.

6. KUUMBA

(CREATIVITY)

To always do as much as we can, in the way we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it.

7. IMANI

(FAITH)

To believe with all our heart in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.

SUGGESTED PRE-FILM DISCUSSION

Have a discussion about the relationship between education and self-determination. The facilitator should ask the group to share themes, historical events or personal experiences that come to mind.

List the examples on a board as the discussion continues and revisit the question at the film's end.

Have their answers changed? If so, why?



PART 1: UJIMA

COLLECTIVE WORK AND RESPONSIBILITY

To build and maintain our community together and make our brother's and sister's problems our problems and solve them together.

“New York City, to this day, has one of the most segregated school systems in the country.”

– SUZANNE SPELLEN, HISTORIAN

QUESTIONS

- How diverse were the school systems in which you were educated? What does Suzanne Spellen's comment say about equity and education in New York City?
- Why does Mark Winston Griffith say the attempt to integrate Brooklyn public schools was a deeply flawed experiment?
- What was the idea of community control? Why did the parents and teachers in Ocean-Hill Brownsville want community control?

“To keep people motivated in doing the work of nation-building, we would say, ‘Kazi is the blackest of all.’ Kazi means ‘work’ in Swahili.”

– MALIKA IMAN, EAST FAMILY MEMBER

“The work was 24 hours, which was the excitement but also the exhaustion of those initial few years of building out the East complex.”

– KWASI KONADU, HISTORIAN

QUESTIONS

- How did the value of Kazi (work) impact East members? How might this principle affect someone's long-term health?
- Can there be a balance between self-care and political organizing?

EXERCISE: GROUP POEM

- Return to the initial question: What is the relationship between education and self-determination?
- Ask participants to expand on their responses on a piece of paper individually.
- Once everyone has finished writing their answers, ask people to go around and share their responses.
- As participants share their answers, those listening should write down their favorite line or term they hear on paper.
- Next, the facilitator should use a board or chart paper and ask participants to share their favorite lines.
- The facilitator should write them down until everyone has had a chance to share.
- Conclude the exercise by reading the group poem together.

PART 2: NIA

PURPOSE

To make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community to restore our people to their traditional greatness.



“I was a young teacher in the 1960s, having entered the system in 1962....I felt I was part of the freedom struggle of Black people. I was part of the ongoing struggle of the Black community to establish itself, to obtain self-determination, to obtain dignity and to obtain liberation.”

– JITU WEUSI, CO-FOUNDER AND LEADER OF THE EAST



“The East was filled with youthful exuberance. All young people, basically very gung ho. They were really the forerunning foot soldiers of the organization.”

– MARTHA BRIGHT, EAST FAMILY MEMBER

EXERCISE: PAST AND PRESENT

Young people have been active participants and catalysts of social movements throughout history. Brainstorm or research other youth-led social justice movements. Divide participants into groups and assign them a time period (e.g., 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s).

When participants have concluded their group work, facilitate a conversation using a Venn Diagram on chart paper or a board, and identify similarities, differences and overlapping characteristics.

Conclude the discussion with similarities with the birth of The East organization.

PART 3: KUUMBA

CREATIVITY

To always do as much as we can, in the way we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it.



“At the heart of the East was this recognition that culture was at the foundation of throwing off the yoke of white supremacy.”

**– MARK WINSTON GRIFFITH,
COMMUNITY ORGANIZER AND
JOURNALIST**

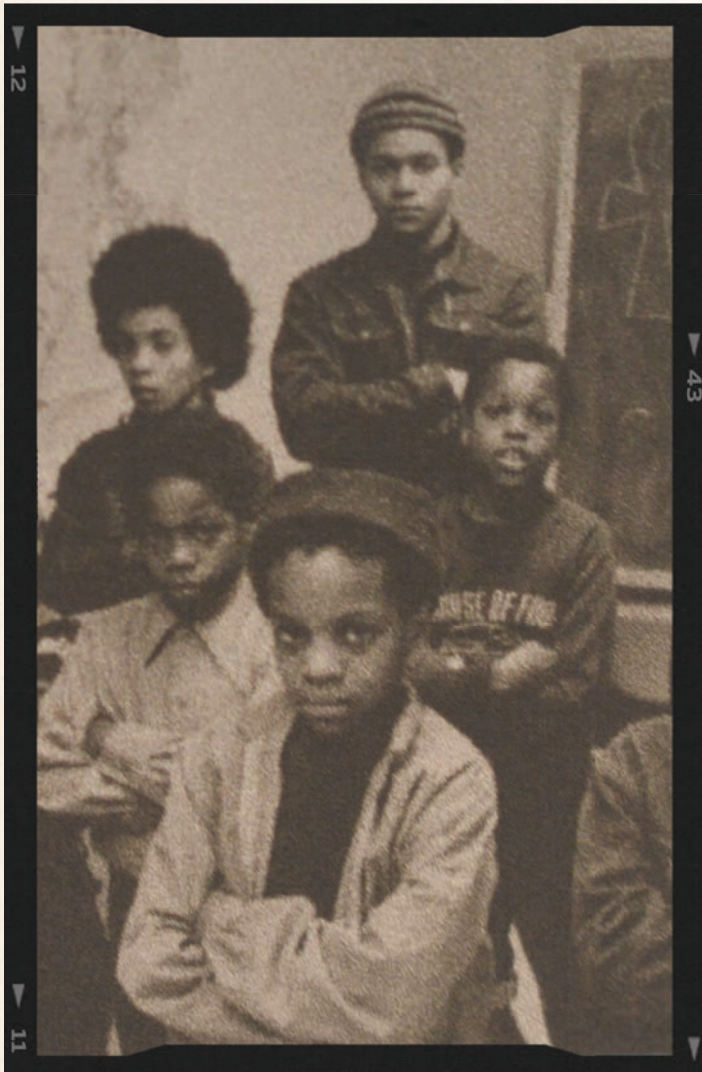
QUESTIONS

- How did The East use culture to inspire Black self-determination?
- What does Dwana Smallwood mean by, “We were the original Wakanda children?”
- What is the relationship between art and political change? How did the East use art and culture to fuel political change?

PART 4: UMOJA

UNITY

To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation and race.



“Many children who go to public school pledge their allegiance to the United States of America.

We had a different pledge. We pledged ourselves to contributing to the Black liberation movement, to our freedom.

That meant that whatever we did was a part of this process of trying to make sure we were, every day, putting something in the pot of changing the material conditions of our people.”

**– LUMUMBA AKINWOLE-BANDELE,
EAST FAMILY MEMBER**

QUESTIONS

- What is Pan-African solidarity, and why did The East believe in this principle?
- Do any of the issues the Uhuru Sasa Shule students protested overlap with the issues the Black community faces today?

EXERCISE: SOCIAL JUSTICE NOW

The students of Uhuru Sasa Shule participated in social justice demonstrations as a part of their education. Independently or in groups, create a thought web and brainstorm topical social justice issues in the present.

What issues impact you, your community and those you care about? Topical issues can be national or global (climate change, reproductive rights, gentrification, LGBTQ+, etc.).

On the upper left-hand corner, write “**Identify**” as a column header; write “**Think**” as an adjacent column header to the right; and in the rightmost column, write “**Action.**”

IDENTIFY	THINK	ACTION

First, vote on a social justice issue as a class or divide participants into groups.

Once an issue has been determined, write the issue under the “**Identify**” column.

In the film, Jitu Weusi, his colleagues and the African American Student Association started an evening school after the community control experiment ended. What next steps can participants think of to address the issue they selected? Once participants are ready, they should record their thoughts under the “**Think**” section. It is okay to have more than one answer for this step.

Finally, under the “**Action**” column, write the action that must be taken to carry out the aforementioned step(s).

EXERCISE: MAKING A PROTEST SIGN

As Lumumba Akinwole-Bandele explained in the film, Uhuru Sasa Shule students actively participated in social justice demonstrations. This section will guide students through making protest signs.

MATERIALS



MARKERS



PENCILS



PAINT



FELT



POSTER SHEETS

1.

First, identify a new issue or revisit a social justice issue explored in the previous exercise. Participants can also explore words and symbols that signify peace and kindness.

2.

Next, take poster paper and write a protest sign for the chosen issue. Get creative using various materials such as paint, markers and pencils. Felt can also be used to trace words and symbols to cut out.

3.

Lastly, discuss where the sign might be of use. Is there an event coming up they can participate in? Should the poster be art to bring attention to an issue?

PART 5: UJAMAA

COOPERATIVE ECONOMICS

To build and maintain our own stores, shops and other businesses, and to profit from them together.



“Nation-building, of course, has to be built on institutions.”

– MARTHA BRIGHT

The Ujamaa principle commits to investing in the community and sharing wealth. This interdependent economic model focused on equity rooted in exchange within the Black community. At its peak, The East was connected to 25-30 businesses and other Black-owned enterprises such as the Black News newspaper, East Records, Imani Child Development Center, Mavazi Clothing Shop and more. For this reason, Black-owned businesses are not simply stores but a part of a geography of communal exchange, allowing Black communities to benefit from each other’s labor. Investing in the community and sharing wealth combats income inequalities through direct ownership.

QUESTIONS

- Given the history of slavery, why is it important that Black people can benefit from their own labor?
- How did The East’s expansion to Guyana serve as a model of cooperative economics?
- Why was cooperative economics essential to The East’s vision?

PART 6: TOOLBOX FOR TELLING STORIES

The Sun Rises in The East uses interviews and primary documents to show the birth of the organization and its importance to the Black community of Central Brooklyn, as well as to the Black Diaspora. This section reflects storytelling techniques through image inquiry.

A primary source is an object or document created by someone with firsthand knowledge of events during the period in question. A secondary source is created by someone who did not participate in the events and bases their ideas on primary sources. What kind of primary sources does the film use?

First, divide the participants into groups and assign each group an image.

IMAGE #1



IMAGE #2



IMAGE #3



Ask them to analyze the image using the following questions:

QUESTIONS

- What is going on here? (Answer the who, what, when, and where.)
- What do the images tell us about the East organization?
- What would it sound like to transport ourselves through time and “hear” the image?
- What kind of message is the artist or photographer trying to convey?
- How would you describe the style of the illustration or photograph?
- What is the most striking aspect of the image?

Reconvene as a group and pose the question: How does each primary source tell the story of The East? Encourage different groups to share and exchange ideas.



EXTENSION ACTIVITY

This activity can be used as an assignment to collect local oral history.

The documentary used interviews to tell the story of The East. Interviews are a form of oral history, capturing memories of people speaking — an important task to keep the history of a community alive to pass on to future generations. The contributions of former East members Lumumba Akinwole-Bandele, Fela Barclift, Dwana Smallwood and others are integral to preserving Central Brooklyn’s legacy as a Black nation.

As a group, make a list of Black-owned businesses and family-owned stores.

Next, assign individuals or groups to a local business to research and visit for an interview with the owner or staff member. *Consult the Smithsonian’s [guide to conducting oral history](#) to prepare for the interview.

When the assignment is concluded, consider the suggested questions for reflection:

QUESTIONS

- What made the establishment you visited unique?
- What kind of role does the business play in the community?
- How was the business doing?

RESOURCES

FILMS & PODCASTS

- *Eyes on the Prize*, Season 3, Episode 2, “Power!: 1966-68” directed by Terry Kay Rockefeller and Louis Massiah
- *School Colors* podcast, “Season 1: Brooklyn” by Mark Winston Griffith and Max Freedman
- *Sun Ra: Brother from Another Planet* directed by Don Letts
- *Black Theatre: The Making of a Movement* directed by Woodie King Jr.
- *The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975* directed by Göran Olsson

SUGGESTED READING

- *A View from The East* by Kwasi Konadu
- *Inside Ocean Hill-Brownsville: A Teacher’s Education, 1968-69* by Charles S. Isaacs
- *New York City Public Schools from Brownsville to Bloomberg: Community Control and Its Legacy* by Heather Lewis
- *The Strike That Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis* by Jerald E. Podair
- *How to Kill a City: Gentrification, Inequality, and the Fight for the Neighborhood* by Peter Moskowitz
- *Gentrification and Inequality in Brooklyn: New Kids on the Block* by Judith DeSena
- *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It* by Mindy Thompson Fullilove
- *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* by Michelle Wallace
- *This Is Our Music: Free Jazz, the Sixties, and American Culture* by Iain Anderson
- *Ready for Revolution: The Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture)* by Stokely Carmichael with Ekwueme Michael Thelwell
- *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing*, edited by Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal
- *“After Mecca”: Women Poets and the Black Arts Movement* by Cheryl Clarke
- *The Slave* by Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka
- *A Nation Within a Nation* by Komozi Woodard
- *The Bronx is Next* by Sonia Sanchez

CREDITS

© 2023 Black-Owned Brooklyn LLC

Produced and edited by Tayo Giwa and Cynthia Gordy Giwa

Written by Akane Okoshi

Design by Courtney Stack

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS



Tayo Giwa and Cynthia Gordy Giwa directed, wrote and produced *The Sun Rises in The East*. A married couple, they are also the creators of [Black-Owned Brooklyn](#), an online publication and Instagram account in which they document local Black business, culture and history. In this work they seek to preserve and celebrate stories that are often erased in gentrified Brooklyn.

Their debut film, the 2020 documentary short [Soul Summit: Doin' It in the Park](#), examined Soul Summit, a beloved open-air house music party in Fort Greene Park. *The Sun Rises in The East*, their first feature, is the result of simply being unable to shake the story of The East since first learning about the organization. They sought to capture this history in the voices of people who lived it. Drawing inspiration from The East's self-sufficient spirit, the Giwas made the film independently without formal industry training.