

BLACK CHILD JOURNAL

Special Edition: Rites of Passage-Foundations and Practices

FROM THE GUEST EDITOR and PUBLISHER

During 1984-86, my wife Marquita and I used the process of rites of passage for guiding our sons and daughters toward adulthood. The process evolved into the Simba Na Malika Network and included youth and other parents from the community. In the journey, many helpers provided advice, support, direction, inspiration and validation. Individuals such as Useni Perkins, Nsenga Warfield Coppock, Preston Wilcox, Hannibal Afrik, Gwen Gilyard, Jawanza Kunjufu, and others. Many of the aforementioned helpers and guides have transitioned and joined the respected realm of the "living and dead"; however, one continues the work as a spiritual guide, poet, and publisher, Useni Perkins. Useni Perkins has been a hands-on worker with Black youth for more than five decades. Our paths crossed in the early 80's because of our youth development and community building work. The intersection of our thinking and practices was captured in Elder Perkins', 1987 publication, "Harvesting New Generations", and my 1992 publication, "Coming of Age". Both publications were comprehensive expositions on Black youth; and provided a careful analysis of their problems: personal, societal, and institutional as well as potential solutions for the future.

Over the years, we have maintained contact and supported each other's work in serving youth, family and community. We both feel that African Americans during the 21st century are facing the most dangerous times since our presence in this country and existence on the globe. Over the past two hundred years, industrial civilization has relentlessly been undermining Earth's chemistry, water cycles, atmosphere, soils, oceans, and thermal balance. Plainly said, a shutting down of the major life systems of our planet.

Compounding the ecological crisis are decaying economies, racism, ethnic and class conflict, and worldwide warfare. Entwined with, and perhaps underlying, these devastations are epidemic failures in individual human development. Things definitely are falling apart in our communities and world at large!

True adulthood, or psychological maturity, has become an uncommon achievement in Western and Westernized societies, and genuine elderhood nearly nonexistent. Interwoven with arrested personal development, and perhaps inseparable from it, our everyday lives have drifted vast distances from our species' original intimacy with the natural world and from our own uniquely individual natures, our souls.

The urgency of our time and space necessitates a fundamental shift in worldview and values in cultivating wholeness and community in a fragmented society and world.

Useni and I agree that enhanced human maturation through cultural development pathways and rites of passage is needed with all deliberate speed for raising healthy children; preparing adolescents for the initiatory adventure that opens the way to mature, authentic adulthood; and enhancing the cultural artistry and fulfillment of adult and elder lives.

It is an honor to partner with the Black Child Journal and co-publish the special edition of "Rites of Passage: Foundations and Practices" with Useni Perkins. The special edition will commemorate the National Rites of Passage Institute's, Summer, 2013, National and International Conference, Baltimore, Maryland. I am very excited that the Black Child Journal and National Rites of Passage Institute partnership has resulted in a variety of outstanding scholarly and pragmatic articles that will address the theory, practice, and research related to rites of passage including community building, youth development, education/socialization, faith and spirituality, restorative justice and evaluation.

The articles included in the special edition of "Rites of Passage" are dedicated to the memory and legacy of Dr. Anthony Mensah. His life, as well as those of other pioneers such as Dr. Nsenga Coppock, Hannibal Afrik, Gwen Gilyard and Darryl Kennon was dedicated to the practice of rites of passage as a paradigm for youth development and community building. The timeliness of the special edition of "Rites of Passage" corresponds to the desperate times and the need for "Sankofa" or going "Back to the Future" to fetch ways of thinking and doing that were in balance with nature and culture.

Two quotes that are appropriate for the times and the occasion are as follows:

**We cannot escape our origin,
However hard we try,
Those origins contain the key
-Could we but find it-
To all that later come.
-James Baldwin Notes of a Native Son**

**Each generation must out of relative obscurity
discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it.
-Frantz Fanon The Wretched of the Earth**

It is our time! Seize it for the sake of the ancestors,
living, and yet unborn!
paul hill, jr

cleveland, ohio
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