

Akoben Rites-of-Passage Society

By Dr. Kamau Rashid

Founded in 2015, Akoben Rites-of-Passage Society was established by four fathers to address a need for rigorous, ethical, and African-centered processes of socialization for African youth in the US. The founders of this program understood that raising a standard of manhood and creating a model of preparation for manhood are necessary and essential actions to overcoming the cultural crisis which exists within our community. In a community and society where manhood is ill-defined, we determined that we needed to participate in the process of creating men who were grounded in their culture and traditions, upright in speech and action, and resolved to contribute to the future of African people. Our work was informed by many things, including the pioneering legacy of Baba Hannibal Afrik, our wives, and concerned elders in the community who recognized a vacuum in the socialization of our youth.

Our group, which is active in the Chicago-area works with young men 11 to 18 years old. The youth of Akoben, whom we call *mashujaa wachanga* (Swahili for “young warriors”) learn about African history, philosophy, martial arts, survival skills, language, health and nutrition, dance and music, and so on. They have learned the South African Gumboot Dance--which they have performed at Kwanzaa celebrations throughout the Chicago area, they have also studied and played the African Brazilian fighting art Capoeira, as well as Umlabalaba (also known as “Zulu Chess”). They have tested each other’s skill in Zulu stick-fighting, researched locally available medicinal wild plants, devised a digital timeline of African history, and conducted research about African languages. In all of these activities, our Mashujaa Wachanga have been able to internalize various facets of the rich and multi-faceted mosaic of African thought and

culture—which they are encouraged to internalize so as to pass these knowledges on to the future.

Most recently, the youth of Akoben have volunteered at Your Bountiful Harvest Family Farm, where they have learned about the role of food production as a key domain in African people's struggle for sovereignty and self-determination. They have also learned how farming can be a profoundly powerful healing modality. Lastly, the mashujaa wachanga recently did a martial arts demonstration at a local Junteenth celebration where they amazed onlookers with their skills in two different style of African stick-fighting.

Inevitably, Akoben Rites-of-Passage Society has been built around the notion that when one plans for the future, you leave nothing to chance. We are resolved to build a better future for African people. We are determined to raise men who will be good husbands and fathers, brothers and friends, and also leaders in our work to restore African people.