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I am a King: A Rite of Passage to Manhood By Sequan Born Spigner

When I walk out of my house each day I cannot help but feel I am in a battlefield. Missiles are flying over my head and carnivorous bullets originating from advertisements and stereotypes are harming anyone with traces of individuality. My only weapons are my words, ideas, and thirst for knowledge. I have been born not only to win the battle, but also the war. I do this while focusing on the words of Fredrick Douglass as if they were the solution to all that is wrong: "Without struggle there is no progress." I will struggle to succeed.

I have realized the atrocities of today with the help of The Brotherhood/Sister Sol, stationed in Harlem and created to empower Black and Latino youth. I am not what the mass media advertises to the world, but instead I am human. I am an individual, not a statistic or consumer as viewed by the corporations of the world. Even though I am commonly portrayed as a hustler, gangster, rapper, thief, and misogynistic jester by the media and throughout history, I live in a reality where I am a brother, son, leader, and young man with goals that will shake the world itself. I have accepted that my brown skin is inescapable and I am proud of it and of my history.



I was twelve when I became a member of the Intrinsic Kings Chapter. We are just one chapter of the Brotherhood/Sister Sol Rites of Passage Program, a collective of young men who aspire to improve the world around us.

I was lured by the smell of pizza and tales of fun trips. I soon found out there was so much more to be gained and my journey towards manhood began. Who are you? What do you, and will you, represent? How will you be remembered? These are questions my chapter leaders presented to me and my twelve brothers numerous times. I think the scariest and most empowering part was that we were not directly given answers; but instead we determined what they were seeking from us: solutions would have to be found from within.

Covered in a cocoon of knowledge, a metamorphosis began. It was as if I was being reborn and this time I was given the ability to see all that was around me, racism, misogyny, gentrification, police brutality and issues related to sexuality and self respect. I now saw the problems and I felt the need to find a solution. But what is the path to righteousness? Would I have to walk this road alone, or would others be with me?

It was a three day long wilderness and bonding retreat that symbolized my chapter taking the next step into becoming men, brothers and leaders – into becoming Intrinsic Kings. At this retreat, we recited our Oaths of Dedication, personal mission statements, codes of honor, which we will strive to live up to for the rest of our lives. That night I received my tan shirt along with my brothers, a symbol of taking the next step. We receive different paraphernalia as we move through the rites of passage program. This shirt symbolizes our creation of Oaths of Dedication, and symbolizes who we are as individuals, leaders and men. On the back of the shirts is a quote from Roberto Clemente: “If you have the opportunity to make things better and you don’t you’re wasting your time on this earth.”

After the ceremony, we felt like men, and as we sat around the campfire we shared all the good and the bad memories of our lives. We all learned what it meant to be brothers at that flame as we expressed the ups and downs of life, the hidden frustrations and emotions. With tears flowing down some of our faces, we experienced true brotherhood, accepting one another for who we are and embracing one another with hugs and respect. From that moment on we were an inseparable chapter - we became The Intrinsic Kings.

Every week, for the last seven years, during our free time, we have met as a collective. This period is when we challenge ourselves, learning about political movements, Black and Latino empowerment, current events that affect us directly and indirectly, sexism, misogyny, sexuality, education, health and our positive futures. Our chapter leaders present us with information that allows us to make conscious decisions on our own. These sessions have taken away that feeling of being powerless and with knowledge I have been given the option to succeed.



My chapter members and I have learned from each other in and out of session, and in and out of the country. I was privileged to see how my brothers experiences in countries like South Africa, Brasil and Ghana have changed their way of thinking and humbled them as individuals. As they grew, I grew, never forgetting the promises we make to each other about becoming successful and changing the world.

The Brotherhood/Sister Sol is not a program but a way of life. I don't think it is possible for us to stop walking a path based on the themes of The Brotherhood/Sister Sol: Positivity, Community, Knowledge and Future. These ideals have been engraved in the caverns of our hearts and members, alumni, and staff would never allow this flame to be extinguished.

Sequan Born Spigner graduated from Thurgood Marshall Academy in 2008 and won full scholarship to Brandeis University. [More info](#) about The Brotherhood/Sister Sol.

