

# The Culture Cure

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## Identifying the Problem

The statistics are alarming. The trends are clear. African Americans continue to suffer from increasingly high rates of crime, incarceration, high school dropouts, teen pregnancy and medication use among African American children. According to the US Census Bureau, African Americans make up 12% of the total U.S. population yet comprise 44% of the incarceration population. In Georgia alone African Americans represent 29 % of the state total population yet are a shocking 62 % of the prisoners. In 2004, homicide victimization rates were 6 times higher and homicide offenders rate were 7 times higher for African Americans than whites. Of equal concern is the current scholastic performance of African Americans with nearly half of all African Americans failing to graduate. Dropouts are more likely than high school graduates to be unemployed, live in poverty, be incarcerated or have children who also drop out of school thus continuing this vicious cycle

## Understanding the Cause

We at the SANKORE Foundation believe that behind these alarming statistics is a lack of racial identity among African Americans. Racial identity can be defined as the extent to which one takes on culturally centered values and demonstrates a strong commitment to improving the lives of other people of their same ethnicity. Studies suggest that racial identity influences outcomes such as academic performance, delinquency, social function (self esteem, coping skills, and interpersonal sensitivity), and drug use among African Americans (Whaley, '93; Jefferson & Caldwell, '02; J. Black Psychology). Additional studies have indicated that racial identity serves as a buffer against the stressful experiences that place African American families at greater risk for mental health problems (Fischer, Tokar & Serna, 1998; Nghe & Mahalik, 2001 J. Black Psychology). Thus, African Americans who identify strongly with their African heritage are more likely to be well adjusted and participate in activities that benefit their immediate communities. Religious leaders, politicians, and community groups all try valiantly to take up these critical issues by implementing programs geared towards encouraging greater social responsibility, and improved access to education and economic resources. Yet, these noble endeavors have failed to adequately address the psychological phenomena facing African Americans. If the root cause of the detrimental social behavior of the African Americans is related to a lack of racial identity, then any attempt to improve the social functioning of African Americans must begin with a supreme focus on fostering a greater sense of racial awareness, appreciation, empathy, and pride.

## Defining our Mission

The SANKORE Foundation was created as an evidence-based solution to address and reverse the negative psychological effects of poor racial identity.

Our mission is to improve the functioning among African American families and cultivate a greater sense of racial identity. Our approach is trilateral and the initiatives run concurrently. SANKORE Indigenous Knowledge Study and SANKORE Volunteer effectively addresses and enhances the racial identity of African Americans through submersion into the rich culture of Northern Ghana and facilitates for all participants active involvement in the daily life of the local people.

SANKORE Community is a network of community upliftment projects and includes the Sankore Kitchen, Sankore Cash Smart, and Sankore Media Outreach. Our dynamic partnerships with other goodwill community focused organizations like Community Upliftment Project (CUP) and Money Matters South provide the expertise and logistical support that help breathe life into our community movements. SANKORE is also a valuable resource for families concerned about the quality of American public education and looking for superior alternatives. The small network of African Centered School Systems partnered with the SANKORE blend and balance scholastic excellence with an African and African American cultural prominence where racial identity and self-esteem are not compromised for improved academics.

The most brilliant arms of our mission are SANKORE's submersion programs like SANKORE Indigenous Knowledge

Study and SANKORE Volunteer. SANKORE Indigenous Knowledge Study and SANKORE Volunteer offers the connections and support for those who would like to experience real African life not simply as a tourist but as an extended family member in a traditional African setting. What better way to identify with Africa and its heritage than experiencing its beauty firsthand? Have an interest in the arts such as drumming, dancing, or weaving? Would you like to study traditional medicine, herbal formulations, religion and spiritual philosophy? Are you working on your thesis or dissertation? Allow SANKORE Indigenous Knowledge Study to partner you with a mentor in an apprenticeship capacity to further your journey through our dynamic marriage with the Ghana Federation of Tradition Medical Practitioners (GHAFTRAM) and its network of over 1800 traditional healers. Through SANKORE Volunteer, participants are placed in various teaching, learning, or assisting positions (whether it is at a secondary school, university, medical or Agriculture College) throughout the Northern Regions of Ghana. Participants are paired with a mentor in their specific area of interest and placed with a host family in a local village where they can participate in the daily lives of the community.

SANKORE is also about giving back. SANKORE hosts monthly seminars, art exhibits, and entertainment venues to showcase cultural awareness (traditional African customs, personal identity classes, drumming, dancing, and arts & crafts) learned by individuals through SANKORE's community, volunteer, and indigenous knowledge programs. SANKORE seeks to strengthen African American communities in the US by encouraging its participants to share and celebrate their African experience. SANKORE is the vehicle whereby African Americans can develop a sincere appreciation for Africa by bathing in its rich culture, living with its peoples, contributing in a meaningful capacity and making friends.

### **Taking Action**

The time and environment is ideal for the genesis of a realistic model designed for the African American community to develop a real appreciation for and knowledge of its own culture. SANKORE understands and has made tangible the philosophical jewel, "Know thyself." SANKORE is positioned to fill the cultural void within the African American community and replace it with a strong sense of racial identity. Visit us at [www.sankorefoundation.org](http://www.sankorefoundation.org), investigate our programs, and we will see you in Africa.