

Rites Of Passage

What is a rite of passage

“Life transitions...” “[BMX] allow us to share some of the pain we’ve experienced...traumas...[BMX] allow us to learn lessons from [those experiences]...”

{“Rites of passage are culturally-based rituals designed to facilitate members of the community through the different phases of our lives in order to take our rightful places within, and deliver our respective gifts to the community...”}

“We had a rite of passage when I received my name at an LGBT Kwanzaa [gathering]...Until now, I didn’t even realize I had a rite of passage...I was 18 and had just come out...I was a new-bee...They kind of took me under wing...even though my family had forsaken me...It was a rebirth...I am more secure [now]...BMX allowed me [to be who I am]...”

“There is a connection between entitlement and rites of passage...”

{This simple means that we are entitled, as members of the culture or community to be supported by the community through the transitions from one phase or stage [of life] to the next?...}

“We’re conditioned not to feel entitled to be acknowledged and affirmed as the men we are...”In the absence of rites of passage specifically geared for men who love men, do we value our lives differently?

“In the absence of ceremonies or protocols to acknowledge our coming into our manhood, how do we value our selves?...46% of all Black men who have sex with men are HIV+...Sometimes, we drink the Koolaid [internalize and act out anti-homosexual attitudes]...”

“We definitely need rites of passage so that we can feel the confidence others display...We should also feel privileged...”

“BMX has some wonderful teachers...We have rites of passage...They all groomed me so You can be the person You are...When African Americans look at the White person [and compare] ourselves, we may devalue ourselves...We do face negative

things...[But,] sometimes, when you focus on the negative, we can miss [our accomplishments]...When coming out [and] people telling you not to do this and not to do that...But, you do what you felt to do [and you turned out just fine]...We did have rites of passage...”

{“If you had had a coming out party, that might have been construed as a rite of passage...Cotillions, debutante balls, a.k.a. coming out parties, for instance, are rites of passage to facilitate upper-class girls from childhood into womanhood...”}

“One of the benefits of rites of passage is that it gives you a voice...The prom is a rite of passage...” Rites of passage specifically designed for SGL youth prime them for roles of responsibility in the community.

“When you first come [to BMX-DC] You will meet brothers who helped you realize not to keep the healing process...the information [to myself,] but [to] pass it on to my SGL peers whose minds are crying out for something...You can pass the message without fear...You realize you’ve been groomed for that in these spaces...BMX –DC which is why we keep doing the work...Hearing that brothers and sisters are taking their lives...it gives me chills...”

“We’re not entitled to anything...We only get what we fight for...”

“For this thing to be really practical there needs to be some community effort on behalf of SGL young people like scholarships...something tangible...”

“We think [it’s] empowerment as distinct from entitlement [that rites of passage give us]...Empowerment may lead to a sense of entitlement...”

“As a Black man, there are many rites of passage we have never experienced and probably never will...Like the prom...Who are you going [to go] with?...A girl?...you know that whole trauma...”

“[A rite of passage] acknowledges your acceptance into a community...And with that, there comes a set of roles and responsibilities [you will be expected to observe]...”

“Rites of passage refer to a life span...from birth to transition...In Africa [there are] rituals that have been practiced for thousands of years...thousands of years...that have

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been honed down...As Africans, we're people oriented...In an African-centered rite of passage it's about, 'We see you'... 'Hi...How you doin?'...The fact that you are is the entitlement...[In the city] a lot of times we don't acknowledge that we are...That's the remnants of slavery...Being a man and manhood have nothing to do with being heterosexual or bisexual or SGL ...Rites of passage are to build people's character...[and to remind us that] I am because we are...It took thousands [and thousands, and thousands] to make me..."

"[The idea of] a sense of entitlement was something that was hard for me to hear for a long time...I am not there any more...Rites of passage are in stages...One is taking off, and one is a landing...[One is about] I see you and I acknowledge you...Whatever it is you are, go ahead and do what you have come here to do...[such that] little girls who were bar mitzvahed will know that a man is supposed to bring them a diamond ring when they want to marry her...In Africa, there are circles of men in which they let you know what you can do...How far your muscles can flex...That is the nest...The landing is, 'you dare dream of yourself doing something we never envisioned you doing?...The landing is your responsibility [to yourself and to the community]...This trust that you have in yourself [that you can observe your purpose]...This faith...The reason [why] it is very important for us to be here and do this work..." There are rites of passage that could ease the transition of growing older in the SGL community.

"I'm in an anti-aging program...I [reveal] in the things I don't know..."

"Often times, when SGL people come out, they're kicked out of their families...There [rites of passage we can create to support them..."

{"We have among us people who have studied rituals including indigenous rituals, with whom we are going to create rituals to honor ourselves and facilitate us through the phases of our lives..."}

"We do have rites of passage...Even if there is not one in the room, we learn to focus on White people...That's a rite of passage...If we don't contrast ourselves to them, we are seen as strange...That's a rite of passage...Another is [always] remembering we were slaves...Bullshitting ourselves is another rite of passage...[In fact,] slavery made

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our lives easier...When [all] you have to [do is] get up, go to the field and come back, life is easier..."

["Those social patters you refer to like contrasting ourselves to white people are dysfunctional adaptations many of us have learned as a function of our enslavement, but they are not rites of passage...For rites of passage, not only would we not feel so compelled to contrast ourselves with others, but we would have a clearer sense of what we're here for, and a stronger sense of community by which to support each other's doing what we're here to do..."]

"We often commune in a circle and name our ancestors...[we] often don't know many to name, there are seven to nine generations of our ancestors whom we don't know...we are stumped...We had bought into the idea that, because we were slaves there was no way we could know who our ancestors were...But, it was also because we felt shame about the little family tree you did know about...[But, you can] begin a rite of passage by finding out how many generations [you can identify]...A reason [we] don't want to talk about it is shame...[But,] you have to acknowledge [there are people] beyond yourself..."

"African Americans are not ungrateful...We achieved what we did through blood, sweat and tears...By giving up our lives...Slavery is not necessarily over...The mental aspect...It's not over...If we are talking about slavery [it's] because it's indelible...it's not over...we are going to compare Black and White...They're different...Look at the life spans...They're different...They [take for granted] things we're denied...trust me we are going to compare Black and White..."

"If you say that African Americans are ungrateful, you've been duped because you've been trained to see yourself as 'other'...Contrasting ourselves with White people [is a waste of energy] life is not fair...Whoever told you life was fair was lying to you...Slavery is not indelible...stamped on us...Entitlement is looking at the stamp and saying, 'No'...Entitlement is being clear about what is and moving forward..."

"There's a lot of misplaced anger..."

{“Also, no doubt, the result of the absence of rites of passage...which again, is why, moving forward, we are going to conceive rites of passage by which we will acknowledge each other, each other's gifts and facilitate each other towards identifying and giving our gifts”...}

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