

**Interview with Dr. Uhuru Hotep
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Who are “The Bright Lights” and what is their origin?

On one level, “The Bright Lights” is the name (and program) for African youth inspired by the late Dr. Kwame Ture. Administered by Ann Evans Guise and based at Whittier and Pierce elementary schools in North Philadelphia, Bright Lights are challenged to read at least a book a week, study African history, share the knowledge they acquire and work for positive change. In short, becoming a “Bright Light” is to illuminate the world by become an example of African excellence. See www.thebrightlights.com for more info about this initiative.

On another level, but continuing in this same vein, Bright Lights are the descendants of West African freedom seekers and nation builders. In the US, the Caribbean, Central and South America, we trace our psycho-spiritual ancestry and energy to the Maroons. The Maroons were African prisoners of war (POWs) who managed to escape from the English, French, Dutch, Portuguese and Spanish slave labor camps euphemistically called “plantations” and establish their own sovereign nations often in league with Native Americans.

During the 16th, 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, to flourish, Europe’s American colonies needed vast numbers of skilled agricultural workers. While exporting as many poor Europeans as possible and enslaving Native Americans, hundreds of African societies also were attacked and looted. And over the course of 400 years, millions of our African ancestors were captured and sold into slavery usually by Africans to Europeans or Arabs who then shipped them across the Atlantic to serve as the skilled labor force needed to make their American colonies prosper. Thousands of African POWs like Zumbi in Brazil, Nanny and Kudjo in Jamaica, Bookman, Toussaint, Dessalines, and Christophe in Haiti and Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner in the US self-emancipated. And then they organized, their fellow Africans to put an end to the criminal exploitation by and vicious oppression of their European captors by establishing, or attempting to establish, their own independent, autonomous nation-states.

Ranging in size from a few dozen members to several thousand families, the Maroon societies established by our ancestors between 1550 and 1880 were among the first efforts at independent nation building initiated by African people in what the Europeans called the “New World.” Stretching from Brazil in the south to Virginia in the north, Maroon settlements were usually democratic, communitarian, free societies based on African political, economic and social practices. Bright Lights are committed to breaking out of what Wade Nobles calls “conceptual incarceration” to join the “intellectual maroons.” That’s Jacob Carruther’s term for the community of African scholars and activists who have emancipated themselves from the authority of the European intellectual tradition. Establishing Maroon settlements, or what Kwame Nkrumah called “liberated zones,” throughout the global African community, is what Bright Lights are all about.

Can you tell us more about these “Maroons?”

Sure. The word “Maroon” comes from the Spanish word *cimarrones*, meaning “wild ones;” the Portuguese called Maroon settlements *quilombos*. The sovereign Republic of Palmares established in 1595 by Brazilian Maroons, but destroyed by the Dutch in 1696, is probably the best-known Maroon nation in South America. The most lasting effort at Maroon nation building was launched by the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), which was inspired by Bokmon, led by Toussaint, Dessalines, Christophe, and betrayed by Petion, Boyer, Soulouque, and Duvalier. According to Amy Jacques Garvey, her husband, The Honorable Marcus Mosiah Garvey, was of Maroon lineage. And as we speak, the Maroon-descendent Ndjuka people of Surinam are fighting to maintain their cultural autonomy. In the U.S., historian Peter Bergman discovered 50 Maroon settlements established between 1672 and 1864 scattered throughout the south from Virginia to Texas. And today, descendants of Seminole Maroons live in Bracketville, Texas, in Oklahoma and Mexico. Bright Lights, as intellectual maroons, eagerly embrace their African heritage and legacy of cultural restoration and independent nation building and make it their life’s work.

Why the “Johari Sita?”

The short answer is that Bright Lights need African Centered Leadership (ACL). So we developed the Johari Sita as a beginning step. Johari Sita, first of all, is Swahili for “Six Jewels,” and it’s our name for the leadership philosophy and practice we created to shape leadership development for African people. We used the theory construction model pioneered by Maulana Karenga, the widely-known creator of Kwanzaa and the Nguzo Saba.

The six jewels of the Johari Sita are *sankofa*, *ib*, *njia*, *dwat*, *harambee*, and *ndaba*. These six are the backbone of ACL. We began with *sankofa*, a concept borrowed from the Akan people of Ghana, which means “reach back and fetch it,” and refers to historical research. When we did *sankofa* on leadership, we discovered that the world’s first words for leader (*seshemu*), follower (*shemsu*) and leadership (*seshemet*) were coined by the ancient Africans of the Nile River Valley. We also discovered that the world’s first book (*The Teachings of Ptahhotep*), first published 2388 BCE (also in ancient Kmt (Egypt), is actually a leadership textbook. Furthermore, the Akan people of Ghana used the word “*akanfo*” for leader, which incorporates their name.

Apart from these valuable remnants, we found a dearth of material on African leadership theory. Consequently, we decided to follow Dr. Karenga’s lead and borrow concepts and symbols from several African cultures and time periods to fashion what Molefi Asante would call a “composite” African leadership approach. We adapted concepts from the Akan, Kemetic, Swahili, and Zulu peoples to address our need for both a leadership theory and a set of practices rooted in Pan African transnationality. The Johari Sita represents the core set of leadership skill that African people must possess regardless of nationality, ethnicity, religious affiliation or ideological orientation. We believe the essence of 21st century African leadership is embodied in the Johari Sita, and Bright Lights, by definition,

practice its six tenets religiously.

What is your mission?

As servant-leaders to the African World, Bright Lights accept the responsibility of moving African people toward establishing the “True” World Order called forth by what the ancient Africans of Kmt identified as Maat. There is no one, single English word-equivalent for Maat. Maulana Karenga teaches that to approach its essence, we need at least seven English words – truth, justice, order, harmony, balance, reciprocity and propriety. Often depicted as a woman with an ostrich plume adorning her hair, among the ancient Africans of the Nile River Valley, Maat was understood to be a universal law and thus an essential organizing principle.

As to our “mission,” we have come to reverse the 1,000-year cycle of African destruction and underdevelopment Marimba Ani calls the *maafa*, which demands the restoration of Ma’at in human affairs. Along with conscious African people the world over, we do Maat daily, which eats away at the maafa’s foundation like ravenous termites feasting on a soft, wooden structures. Bright Lights seek to leave in their wake what historian Jacob Carruthers tells us in old Africa was called a *Whm Msw (Weheme Mesu)*, a political and cultural renaissance rooted in Ma’at restoration-maafa termination. Now, we can put it all together. Bright Lights seek to break out of conceptual incarceration and join those intellectual maroons who have launched the whm msw to restore maat and end the maafa.

Is this a new movement?

Not at all. Bright Lights have been around for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. We are simply the latest initiates of the ancient order of sankofa. We are learning from the best in our past (history) to build for our future. In fact, if we look closely at U.S. African history these past 200 years, we’ll find that it’s primarily about Bright Lights. Frederick Douglass, David Walker, Harriet Tubman... Bright Lights. Gabriel Prosser, Nat Turner, Sojourner Truth ... Bright Lights. Edward Wilmot Blyden, Ida B. Wells, Benjamin “Pap” Singleton... Bright Lights. W.E.B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, Elijah Muhammad... Bright Lights. Fannie Lou Hamer, Malcolm X, M.L. King... once again, Bright Lights. We cross the Atlantic and we got Nkrumah in Ghana, Lumumba in Zaire, Ture in Guinea, Cabral in Guinea-Bissau, Sankara in Burkina Faso, Nyerere in Tanzania, Odinga in Kenya, Biko in Azania (South Africa), Nasser in Egypt, all these worthies and thousands of others are members of the Bright Lights pantheon of True World Heroes. Our numbers are legion; our genesis is the divine spirit.

Why the web site?

Because the 21st century is the century of African enlightenment leading to the Whm Msw, our people need African centered learning communities situated in liberated zones, honeycombed with resource/research institutes and laboratories/libraries organized for sharing information that transcends regional and national borders operating 24/7/365. An

internet site is one cost-effective way to make some of this happen. Furthermore, we want to provide a cyber-forum for African leadership theorist and practitioners to exchange and critique ideas that contribute toward constructing an Africentric leadership vocabulary and set of best practices. This is how we put the second principle of the Johari Sita – *Ib*, which we interpret to mean data collection, analysis, and exchange – into practice.

Now, how does this all tie into the Kwame Ture Youth Leadership Institute?

Dr. Kwame Ture, the original “Bright Light,” is respected throughout the African World for his many years of service to our people. After spending his youth along side Dr. Martin Luther King and others fighting American apartheid, he called for Black Power, then spent the remainder of his life in Africa building the All-African Peoples Revolutionary Party, which is his final and finest contribution. As tribute to an exemplary African servant-leader and scholar-warrior, the Institute seeks to evoke his spirit of service by developing liberatory programs for Black youth. Our programs and services equip African youth with the conceptual tools to become intellectual maroons and break out of conceptual incarceration. We provide the map and compass for a sacred journey requiring a lifetime to complete. Because the restoration of ma’at back into the global African community thereby ending centuries of African exploitation, degradation and oppression is our end goal, like Kwame Ture, we are unrepentant liberationist “ready for revolution.”

One final question, how do I become a Bright Light?

Well, you may already be one. Remember, a Bright Light is an intellectual maroon. But, let me give you the three major criteria and then you can decide. First of all, becoming a Bright Light, just like becoming a Rastafarian, has nothing to do with the state or condition of your hair, but everything to do with the state or condition of your mind. Because prayer is one proven way to cleanse and strengthen the mind and reading remains the fastest, cheapest, surest way to expand the mind, Bright Lights pray and read incessantly. The prayers must come from your heart, but we have a required reading list for all “wannabee” Bright Lights who “wannabee” down with us.

Next, you must grab hold of the Johari Sita with both hands and use it as a tool for reconstructing African life. This means joining at least one African created, financed, and led organization. Then, energized by your prayers and enlightened by your research, you contribute your constant practice of the six principles of the Johari Sita to the organization. Constant Johari Sita practice leads inevitably toward ma’at restoration – maafa termination and the establishment of our 21st century whm msw. The third and final step simply requires that you share your leadership experiences with us so we can share them with the African community. In short, pray, read, and then practice the Johari Sita. Everything else unfolds from there. Now, let your light shine!

Thank you.

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