

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the 180 Degrees Program *Growing Into Manhood* curriculum, a book made to help you succeed. We aim to provide you with information that will spark your critical thinking, ideas that will challenge your usual ways of engaging with the world, and coaching that will help you make the most of your talents.

This work doesn't transform your life. It enhances it. We know that you are already amazing. You come from an amazing background of intelligent, skilled, and competent people. Each of the chapters in this book uses an Adinkra symbol to represent the concept being discussed. These symbols originated among the Akan people who live in western Africa, the same people many African Americans are related to. These symbols, though not part of our everyday customs, represent wisdom in general and our heritage in particular. Throughout this book, our lessons and discussions will help you learn more about Black history in America and in the world. More importantly, you'll learn more about your place in that history.

A history of greatness feeds an attitude of greatness, and more than anything, this course will help build that attitude in you. This course will push you to reflect on your life experiences and evaluate how those experiences have shaped you thus far. In addition, you will grow as an informed individual, capable of making decisions about your life, armed with a better understanding of how those decisions will impact you. Through the next few months, you will have an opportunity to explore:

1. Your patterns of thought and emotion,
2. The world around you,
3. How you interact with that outside world, and
4. Some tools that may help you overcome hurdles or obstacles you may face now and for the rest of your life.

In addition, the course will not be judgemental or tell you how to live your life. This course was created to help guide you in making sound decisions that ultimately lead to achieving productive outcomes and a successful life.

This is *not* just a course with interesting topics. This is also a manual or guide, if you will, to making more informed decisions and reaching more productive outcomes. This book can *not* tell you what those choices are. You know the circumstances of your life, we don't. And, we know that what might be the wrong choice in one time and place would be the right choice in another. We want you to be skilled at making choices so that you'll know the difference.

The curriculum is centered on five core competencies that frame all successful journeys. These five competencies are at the core of the *Growing Into Manhood* curriculum.

Self-Awareness

- Personal values
- Assessing strengths and limitations
- Recognizing emotions and thoughts and their influence on personal behavior and actions
- Character qualities: empathy, integrity, responsibility, and respect
- Self evaluation and reflection

Self-Development & Management

- Controlling emotions and impulses
- Setting and achieving goals
- Identifying and handling pressure and stress
- Self motivation
- Resolving conflict
- Developing fortitude and determination
- Critical thinking leading to effective judgment

Positive Decision-Making

- Making positive choices
- Ethics
- Safety
- Tolerance
- Evaluating circumstances appropriately to understand consequences of actions
- Consideration of others

Relationship Skills

- Establishing healthy relationships with others in a diverse and changing world
- Effective communication
- Cooperation
- Resisting negative social pressure
- Addressing conflict appropriately
- Helping others
- Seeking help

Social Responsibility & Awareness

- Understanding the environment
- Collaboration and team work
- Media awareness
- Perspective analysis and evaluation
- Adaptability and leadership
- Citizenship
- Community awareness and responsibility
- Empathy with others – social tolerance and understanding
- Recognition of family, community, and school support systems and resources

This book was written by a group of African American adults—teachers, mentors, coaches, counselors, leaders—who have been in your shoes, and if not for their decision making skills, they may not have been here to pass on some of this knowledge. The goal of The 180 Degrees Program is to give you access to valuable knowledge so that you can experience great success in your life while steering clear of life's great problems. Despite our advances as young, Black men, we continue to face persistent challenges.

Some facts you should know:

- 25.8% of Black Americans live in poverty compared to 11.6% of White Americans.
- Black American children are between six and nine times more likely than White children to live in areas of concentrated poverty.
- Approximately two-thirds of Black children live with only one parent.
- Black Americans raised by single mothers are 75% more likely to drop out of school.
- Black American teens are more likely to be unemployed than White teens and this trend of unemployment tends to persist as men get older.
- Black Americans are only 13% of the overall population however, account for 43% of murder victims (2011).
- Homicide is the leading cause of death among Black males ages 10 to 24.
- In 2012, Black males were 6 times more likely to be imprisoned than White males.

Up against these destructive conditions, we cannot continue business as usual. That is why we hope you take these conversations to heart and consider how the ideas we share could improve your situations.

This curriculum has been developed with Black history and culture in mind and will provide you with the skills, knowledge, and the essential tools for life success regardless of your current challenges or your individual circumstances. A better future, one of self-determination and success, lies ahead and can be ours if we visualize it and take specific steps to get there.

Ready?

Let's begin.