

MEMORIES OF AHIDIANA

by Tayari kwa Salaam (2019)

Memories of Ahidiana come floating back to me as I read these publications and essays. On Sundays, Ahidiana members met at our building where we did what we called Utayari (Kiswahili meaning "getting prepared"). Members first ran from the building where Ahidiana was located on Deslonde Street down Caffin Avenue to Florida Avenue and back (approximately one mile) chanting loudly all the way "What time is it? Nation time!" Next members of Ahidiana studied by discussing theories that were in essays or book chapters we agreed to read the previous week. Members would learn philosophies and theories as well as decide on which would be useful in our work. Then we would have our business meeting talking about the work/study center, the bookstore, the publishing company and other Ahidiana entities. The third task Ahidiana members would do was clean the building and prepare the food for the upcoming week. The regularity of Ahidiana getting together weekly built community among us based on the philosophy that reflected who we wanted to be (identity), what we wanted to be about (purpose), and how we wanted to be about our work (direction). These morning sessions of collective renewal prepared Ahidiana members physically (body), mentally (mind), socially (soul) and consciously.

Members of Ahidiana were young adults anxious to change conditions that were oppressing and exploiting African Americans. Though the members of Ahidiana did not know this at the time, we were learning lessons that would last a lifetime. Members creatively conceived definitions describing what we meant by terms that we used as we lived our lives.

One concept Ahidiana members learned as we studied is the widespread use of symbols from the many cultures of Africa. We noticed that when symbols were connected to abstract concepts then symbols would concretize meanings and would help with memory and understanding. Guided by this practice, Ahidiana adopted the practice of using symbols to teach concepts.

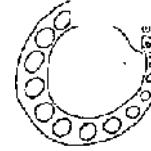
One enduring example of how we used the power of symbols was with the Nguzo Saba/Seven Principles, the moral foundation of Ahidiana. Created and conceived by Dr. Maulana Karenga, the Nguzo Saba/Seven Principles are African/African American cultural guidelines for daily practice and living.

NGUZO SABA/Seven Principles

NGUZO SABA (n-GOO-zo SAH-bah)

Seven Principles

UMOJA (oo-MO-jah) Unity



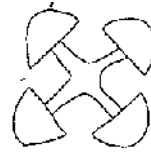
KUJICHAGULIA

(koo-gee-chah- goo-LEE-ah) **Self-Determination**



UJAMAA

(oo-jah-MAH-ah)
Cooperative Economics

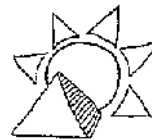


UJIMA

(oo-GEE-mah)
Collective Work &, Responsibility

NIA

(NEE-ah)
Purpose



KUUMBA

(koo-OOM-bah)
Creativity



IMANI

(ee-MAH-nee)
Faith

Working as a collective marked every action we did: collective food buying, collective childcare, collective exercise, collective study, and collective decision making. Members made decisions by way of consensus rather than majority rule. Every Ahidiana member had to agree before we enacted a policy or practice. Sometimes the discuss resolved the issue. Some members would participate by listening. Others would present solutions and point out conflicts. At the end of each discussion, we would reach an agreement or plan for further discussion. Ahidiana had productive exchanges finding out

what would bring about agreement among the members. We were proud that every member placed importance on consensus in our decision-making.

Over time, Ahidiana members noticed a cyclical process of work and study. When we had an idea for organizing the community, we would study first to conceive the plan. Then we would work the plan, learning by doing. Then we would study to evaluate the plan by analyzing the action and outcome. We would use our analysis to determine what was good and beneficial about the plan and what did not work. Guided by that analysis, we would revise the plan and come up with a new improved plan. Then the process of work/study would begin again with the new improved plan. Ahidiana would use this process to solve challenges in our school, our bookstore, our publishing company and other Ahidiana activities.



a work/study circle that we represented by the West African adinkra symbol *Sankofa*, the bird walking in the present looking toward the past to create a better future.

Ahidiana was also the source of the ideology for an independent school grounded in African/African American culturally relevant education. The Ahidiana Work/Study Center used the *Ahidiana Operating Principles* as the foundation for a student-centered curriculum for children ages three to eight. Cultural study was embedded in all daily activities including reading, writing and mathematics practice, as well as physical activity. We developed chants that communicated Ahidiana's complex ideological concepts in simple, memorable ways. For example, "Color, Culture, and Consciousness" teaches young children three essential characteristics of the concept 'blackness'. *Herufi: An Alphabet Reader* teaches Ahidiana's views and beliefs connecting the letters of the alphabet to ideological ideas. Our story book, *Who Will Speak For Us? New Afrikan Folk Tales* uses the Nguzo Saba/Seven Principles as models of behavior in each of the stories.

In a myriad of lessons and educational materials we embedded the Ahidiana ideology in the Ahidiana Work/Study Center curriculum to provide youth with the cultural orientation they needed to be academically excellent; not fearful of theoretical knowledge; who are skilled in communicating ideas through music, art, dance and more importantly, communicating through speaking and writing, as well as who are able to compete with high academic standards of excellence. Secondly, socially advanced, that is, who are committed to our greater collective good rather than limited individual goods or pleasures; who advocate moral development over material development; who are able to build positive social relationships supportive of African American people's identity and struggles; and who are respectful of our total environment rather than destructive of it. Finally, politically progressive, that is, women and men who have a sense of purpose and are committed to African American people first; who are conscious of African/African American people's history, collective conditions and hoped-for future; who are capable, that is, possess the will and ability to be revolutionaries, leaders and workers for African American people; who seek the truth and base their ideas of reality rather than idealism, on rationality rather than fanaticism, on truth rather than metaphysics.

Current conditions are not the same as they were in the past when Ahidiana existed nor are people the same as they were in the past in the days of Ahidiana. However, the needs and wants of our children and young people have remained the same. Our youth need to be raised, that is, provided for, protected, respected, inspired, educated, and socialized. The Ahidiana Work/Study Center was our way of providing youth these needs. While our work has ended, we see many of the same needs for youth today.

The richness of Ahidiana Work/Study Center derived from its relationship to the ongoing work and study of the larger organization. African-centered education is vital education that can provide youth with the mental, spiritual, and ideological fortitude they need to confront the realities of this society. Working in concert with an organization whose purpose is to build community will help provide youth with:

- their basic needs: food, clothing, shelter and transportation as well as a community to support the efforts of homes and schools. (Too often our youth's needs and wants get confused with adults' needs and wants.);
- protection from all harm. (Unfortunately, our youth are harmed almost every minute of every day physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.);

- respect as the intelligent, warm, loving individuals they are. (If we put ourselves in our youth's shoes, we would find ourselves in a land of giants who fuss and holler and expect you to say and do things you don't understand. As adults we tend to use our age, our size, our voice and our experience to bully our youth as less than who they are.);
 inspiration by example, by what we say and by what we do. (Youth are impressionable, that is, they learn always in all ways.);
 education in the best learning environments with the best experiences for their growth and development. (Example, what we do vs. what we say is always the best teacher. No matter if the example is good, bad, or in-between, example teaches.);
- socialization, by being moral and upright in our social (social) relationships as well as holding our youth accountable for their morality and the quality of their social relationships.

The successes of the Ahidiana organization and the Ahidiana Word/Study Center (school) demonstrated youth who grow up to be conscious, peace-loving world citizens.