**Headline:** How a Community Collaborative in Arkansas Is Pioneering Solutions to Long-Standing Social Problems

**Teaser:** Sankofa Village Arkansas is building an “intentional community centering Black healing, liberation, and regeneration.”

By Damon Orion

**Author Bio:** Damon Orion is a writer, journalist, musician, artist, and teacher in Santa Cruz, California. His work has appeared in Revolver, Guitar World, Spirituality + Health, Classic Rock, and other publications. Read more of his work at [DamonOrion.com](https://damonorion.com/).

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**[Article Body:]**

Redlining, exclusionary zoning, and predatory lending schemes have put prospective Black homeowners at a [severe disadvantage](https://www.urban.org/racial-equity-analytics-lab/structural-racism-explainer-collection/causes-and-consequences-separate-and-unequal-neighborhoods). As the Ballard Center for Social Impact [points out](https://ballardbrief.byu.edu/issue-briefs/the-homeownership-gap-between-black-and-white-families-in-the-united-states), the gap in homeownership rates between Black and white families was larger in 2019 than in the 1960s. In 2023, the National Association of Realtors [reported](https://www.nar.realtor/newsroom/more-americans-own-their-homes-but-black-white-homeownership-rate-gap-is-biggest-in-a-decade-nar) a nearly 29 percent homeownership divide between these two populations—the largest gap in a decade.

Arkansas residents are well acquainted with this disparity. In 2021, the Hope Policy Institute [assessed](http://hopepolicy.org/manage/wp-content/uploads/Arkansas-Housing-Report-v4.pdf) the gap between Black and white homeowners in Arkansas to be roughly 26 percent, a [greater split](https://www.ualrpublicradio.org/local-regional-news/2021-11-29/report-highlights-disparity-between-black-and-white-homeowners-in-arkansas) than seen during the 2008 housing crisis.

Meanwhile, Arkansas is the [only state in the U.S.](https://lawgroupnwa.com/the-implied-warranty-of-habitability-arkansas-stands-alone-in-landlord-tenant-law) without an implied warranty of habitability, which requires landlords to provide livable conditions for their renters. The absence of minimum living standards has been [linked](https://www.pewtrusts.org/~/media/Assets/External-Sites/Health-Impact-Project/ACI-2017-Warranty-of-Habitability-prelim-summ.pdf?la=en) to chronic disease, injuries, decreased mental health, and poor development in children.

“We shouldn’t still be fighting to live in healthy spaces and places,” says Arkansas native Clarice Kinchen (Abdul-Bey). “We should have people in [legislative positions] who care enough to make sure we’re safe.”

Kinchen (Abdul-Bey) is one of [seven members](https://www.sankofavillagearkansas.com/who-we-are) of [Sankofa Village Arkansas](https://www.sankofavillagearkansas.com/about-9), “a forming intentional community centering Black healing, liberation, and regeneration.” According to the group’s [website](https://www.sankofavillagearkansas.com/about-9), Sankofa aims to “transform multigenerational community health through education and land stewardship for the purposes of housing affordability, community wealth building, and climate resiliency.”

Sankofa aims to create an “[intentional community](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2ar-xLDS8g&t=275s)” to help provide multi-generational affordable housing, hold events and ceremonies, and move from “[extractive to regenerative systems](https://www.sankofavillagearkansas.com/about-9)” through practices and resources like water reuse, wind and solar power, car sharing, and vertical, [hydroponic, and aquaponic farming](https://gogreenaquaponics.com/blogs/news/hydroponics-with-fish-and-aquaponics).

“Our dream is that Black Arkansans have access to intentional communities where they can safely engage in healing and liberatory practices in relationship with each other and Mother Earth,” the collaborative’s site [states](https://www.sankofavillagearkansas.com/about-9).

Danielle M. Jones, a self-described “weaver” of this project, explains that most of Sankofa’s members are healers. “A couple of us guide movement and breath, and a couple of us guide healing in groups that have been traumatized in multiple ways.”

Kinchen (Abdul-Bey), a massage therapist, Reiki practitioner, youth mentor, and activist, describes Arkansas as “a traumatized community,” noting that the state has one of American history’s [highest rates of racist lynchings](http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/shipp/lynchingsstate.html). In recognition of this violent history, she co-created the [Arkansas Peace and Justice Memorial Movement](https://apjmm.org/), which commemorates victims of racist violence.

“For me, it was important to do that work, having a connection with family who dealt with tenant farming, sharecropping, and the evils of inequality,” she says.

Jones teaches yoga and holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in sociology and environmental studies, a Master of Science degree in educational leadership and policy, and a graduate certificate in sustainable food systems. She explains that as she got deeper into “living in harmony with nature and its patterns” during her college and graduate school years, her father told her stories of “the ways [intentional] communities were very similar to how he grew up mostly during the Jim Crow era in Pine Bluff, Arkansas.” This made her aware that “many people have been involved in a cooperative, alternative economy, or solidarity economy—we just don’t [necessarily] call them that.”

Jones says that these conversations with her father were an important part of her “deeper learning about Black communities and organizing beyond voting rights and the different ways people were trying to rethink living in the United States in a way that corresponded with dignity and a life you could be proud of.”

In the [online information session](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2ar-xLDS8g&t=275s) “Mobilizing People 2023,” Jones observes that Black people have a robust history of connecting with the earth. “I went camping with my parents when I was younger,” she recalls. “You couldn’t just throw things away. There were no recycling plants. If you could reuse something and find another use, where you didn’t have to buy something else or you were just using some creativity, maybe there was some joy coming out of that reuse.” She adds that “tending gardens, growing food, plant medicine, [and] folk medicine,” and living “in tune with nature’s patterns” were important parts of her upbringing and family legacy.

For Sankofa’s members, the collaborative’s name—meaning “[go back and fetch](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2ar-xLDS8g&t=275s)” in the Twi language of Ghana, West Africa—refers to the retrieval of these older practices and values. “It’s a recognition that we have to look back to move forward, which I think is a great lesson in today’s society, when history books are being [erased](https://www.thv11.com/article/news/education/banning-books-removed-arkansas-schools/91-e740f579-f703-45e0-b55b-e90c6c2de4e8), particularly in Arkansas,” Jones states during the interview. “As a Black American, many parts of my ancestry were not recorded or valued, so I look to Indigenous worldviews and places in the world where our people come from as a way to connect and ground myself. I think everyone suffers from white supremacy. Whether you benefit on paper or not, there’s a level of erasure of culture and ancestry that none of us benefit from spiritually.”

Kinchen (Abdul-Bey) observes that this erasure of history and knowledge is ongoing. “If we’re still [receiving] threats of closing schools, closing libraries, taking literature, and all the things we’ve had to endure in the past with education, Sankofa Village is going to be a haven where we can continue the work we do to help [the] community.”