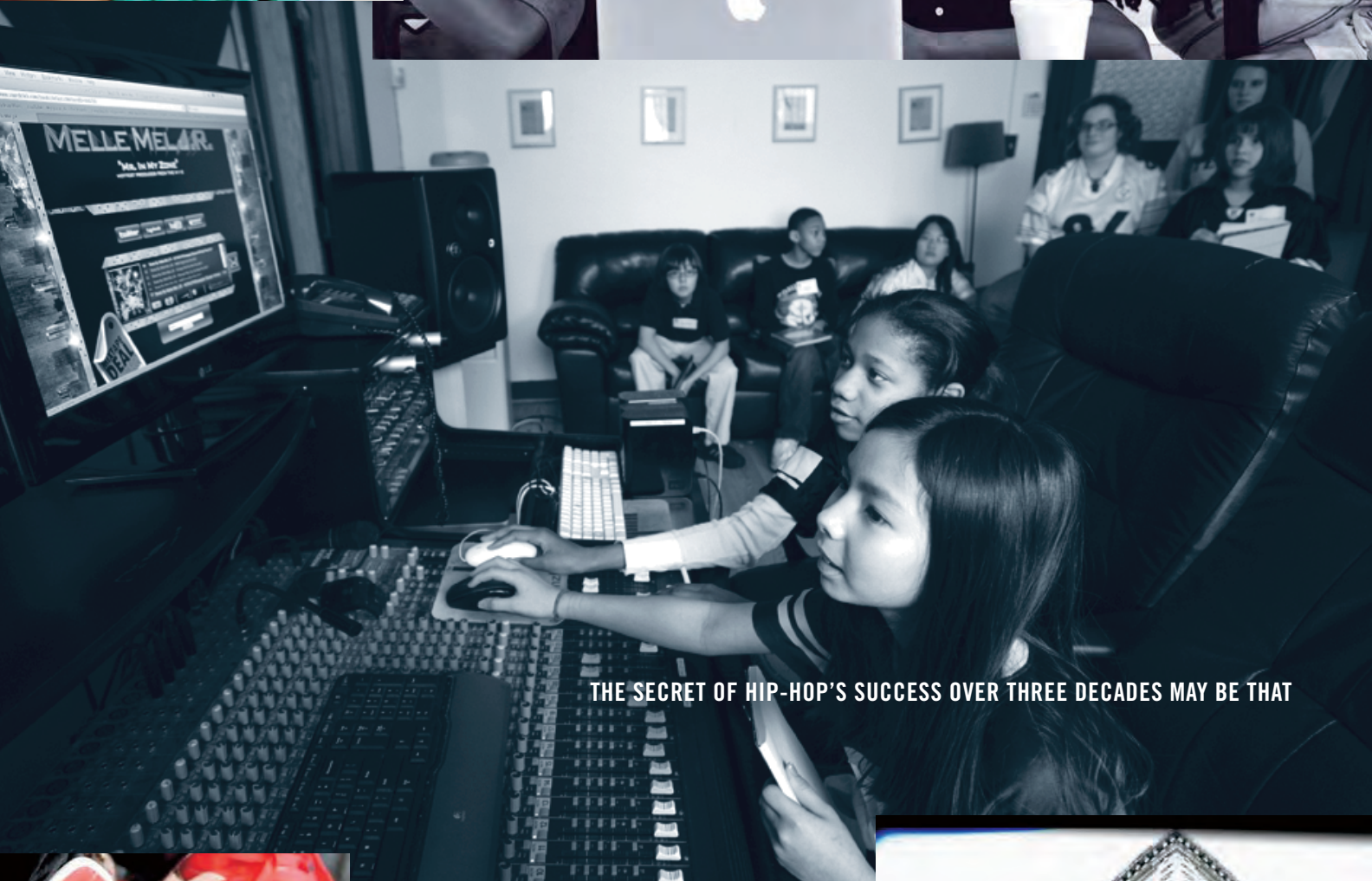




THE SECRET OF HIP-HOP'S SUCCESS OVER THREE DECADES MAY BE THAT



Photos (clockwise from top left) Hip Hop on L.O.C.K., Jim Judkis, Terry Clark, Hip Hop on L.O.C.K., Jim Judkis, Hip Hop on L.O.C.K.

WISE RHYMES

YOUNGER GENERATIONS KEEP RECLAIMING IT AS THEIR OWN. AND NOW PHILANTHROPY IS CHANNELING THAT
PERSONAL OWNERSHIP TO HELP STUDENTS LEARN LIFE-AFFIRMING LESSONS. BY LYNDA GUYDON TAYLOR



Photography by Jim Judkis



Several Endowments grantees are using hip-hop as an art form to engage students in activities that help them to learn important life lessons as well as performance skills. Above, a group of students mingle and sign their names on each other's T-shirts before their K.R.U.N.K. — Kreating Realistic Urban New-School Knowledge — Movement production at Pittsburgh Brashear High School. Below, the students perform their dance on the Brashear stage to hip-hop music with positive themes designed to attract the interest of other youth.

**“... I’M TALKIN’ FOR POOR PEOPLE WHO CAN’T AFFORD TO PAY
I’M TALKIN’ ’BOUT THE WAR AND I GOT MORE TO SAY
I’M TALKIN’ ABOUT THE TIME AND I DON’T MEAN MORRIS DAY
WHILE THEY TALKIN’ ’BOUT THEY OLD BEEFS AND GOLD TEETH
I’M TALKIN’ ’BOUT FREEING MINDS
AND THEY PUTTING SOULS TO SLEEP ...”**

From “Silent Night (Do Rappers Watch the News)” by Jasiri X

In Pittsburgh’s East Liberty neighborhood, 18-year-old Davaughn Bivins, wearing braces and a “Just Do It” T-shirt, taps out a beat on a computer in a second-story recording studio. Black leather couches and a flat-screen television furnish the four-room suite where Bivins and team members meet to collaborate on their latest project with the Hip Hop on L.O.C.K. program. Chrome-colored letters on a wall in an adjoining room spell out the phrase “Ya Momz House,” suggesting hominess in an otherwise all-business environment.

In a Hazelwood church basement, high school dancers and rappers practice their moves on an elevated stage for an evening fundraiser. On the floor, a confident Bria Thomas, 17, whose winning smile and model good looks could grace a fashion magazine, seems at home on a keyboard as she creates percussion and other instrumental sounds behind the vocals for a K.R.U.N.K. Movement performance. That night the dimmed lights and posters with the words “dream” and “music” will bring to mind a coffeehouse rather than the church basement it is.

In Downtown Pittsburgh, political activist Jasiri X hunches over a laptop at the August Wilson Center for African American Culture. With his baseball cap turned sideways, he describes how young black men need to seize control of their image in a way that was unthinkable 35 years ago when hip-hop was in its infancy, and Facebook and blogging were unheard of. Across the table, his project partner, Paradise Gray, with his gray chest-length dreadlocks framing a broad smile, comments on how the two men’s 1Hood New Media Academy is designed to battle negative media influences.

In different settings across the city, teens and young adults are discovering ways to plug into hip-hop, the soundtrack of their generation, to learn about the music business, leadership, health, entrepreneurship or the power of the Internet. As an art form, hip-hop allows young people to rap, emcee, DJ, dance or paint graffiti to tell stories in ways that are significant to them. Efforts to harness the vibrancy of such expressions to teach productive lessons are not new. But The Heinz Endowments and other Pittsburgh foundations are investing in programs that use hip-hop not only as an engaging educational activity but also as a creative, youth-development strategy that could have an impact on students for the rest of their lives.

“What’s compelling is using an art form that young people find meaningful, and exploring ways to inspire them and help them think more critically through media,” says Endowments Arts & Culture Program Officer Justin Laing. He also defends the efficacy of hip-hop as a learning tool. “Hip-hop is a dominant art form of this generation, and the question is not why employ hip-hop, but why not? Why isn’t it more widely used?”

The 1Hood New Media Academy, based at Pittsburgh's August Wilson Center for African American Culture, is a project to challenge black male youth to critically analyze media, including popular hip-hop images, and to tell their own stories through different media platforms. Academy co-creator Paradise Gray, who performed with socially conscious rap group X-Clan, works with student Hakeem George on an audio track for one project.

(Opposite page) 1Hood New Media Academy co-creator Jasiri X, a rapper and activist, talks with a group of students in the program about the media and its impact.



The hip-hop-oriented programs that the Endowments supports are Hip Hop on L.O.C.K., which stands for Leadership Skills, Organizational Skills, Cooperative Economics and Knowledge of the Music Business; K.R.U.N.K.—Kreating Realistic Urban New-School Knowledge—Movement; and 1Hood New Media Academy. The Endowments has invested a total of more than \$247,500 in these three projects. Joining it in supporting Hip Hop on L.O.C.K. and K.R.U.N.K. is the Grable Foundation, which has awarded a total of \$98,000 to those two groups. 1Hood New Media Academy is funded solely by the Endowments.

James Peterson, director of Africana Studies and associate professor of English at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pa., has researched how hip-hop adapts to different learning styles and can be leveraged to engage inner-city kids. Young people possess multiple intelligences, learning through aural, visual and kinesthetic modes. Hip-hop taps into the way children learn, says Peterson, who gives talks on hip-hop education and has been featured on MSNBC, CNN and Fox News. It capitalizes on students' learning strengths, whether they are aural and can be displayed in DJing or rapping; kinesthetic, which can be expressed through dancing; or visual, demonstrated in artistic graffiti. At the same time, students get to write, perform, choreograph and exercise their creativity.

Although hip-hop has been around since the mid-'70s, it was only seven or eight years ago that a push occurred to take it into the classroom, says Peterson. Now programs exist nationwide.

"Teachers are sometimes reluctant to step outside of traditional curricula," he notes. "The public perception of hip-hop is pretty negative with the 'bling bling,' misogyny and gangster image. You have to show the value of it beyond the popular perception."

The arts can be a powerful tool to attract young people, explains Grable Foundation Program Officer Kristen Burns. Sometimes it's the hook that gets them excited about school or larger goals of assuming responsibility and making good choices. The local hip-hop programs also instill concrete skills in music production, she says, and offer strong leaders to whom young people can relate.

In many ways, efforts focusing on the educational potential of hip-hop are taking the art form back to its roots in the '70s and

'80s. That's when it was often used to shed light on social injustice and economic inequities and to encourage urban youth to express their frustrations and settle conflicts through artwork and dance "battles" rather than physical ones. In later years, gangsta rap, with its emphasis on violence and materialism, gained commercial success and drew much public attention away from those using hip-hop to convey socially conscious messages. But as the art form matured, more people began realizing the possibilities of its influence in a variety of fields.

"We need to show and tell decision makers how powerful arts can be in helping children create their own identity and interpret the world around them," contends Endowments Arts & Culture Senior Director Janet Sarbaugh, especially in light of recent government cuts in education and the arts.

The Endowments was looking to develop relationships with groups using hip-hop as an art form and connected with the three programs, which offered a variety of artistic expression.

At Hip Hop on L.O.C.K., Devonte Snowden, a slender and usually talkative 18-year-old, sits at Bivins' side carefully rewriting lyrics to the rap he'll later record in a sound booth. Each has been assigned a role for a mock record label—Snowden acting as engineer and Bivins as producer.

For Snowden, the program offers an opportunity to get his music exposed. He currently works at a Pittsburgh grocery store, but his passion is music. Studio time allows him to express what's going on in his life and to reach out to other youth through rap. "I can't let anything stop me from doing what I want to do," he says.

Begun in 2007, Hip Hop on L.O.C.K. is an arts education and mentoring program that has in-school and after-school components and has received \$132,500 from the Endowments and \$48,000 from the Grable Foundation. Students from kindergarten through 12th grade are introduced to career opportunities available through hip-hop. Even the acronym "L.O.C.K." subtly refers to the business side of the art form: "Lock" is slang for keeping something tight and organized, founder Emma Alaquiva explains.

Winner of a 2008 Emmy for music composition and arrangement for the soundtrack of WQED-TV's "Fly Boys: Western Pennsylvania's Tuskegee Airmen," Alaquiva has seen the in-school portion of the program swell from 15 students to more than 1,000



Photography by Jim Juddis

youth from the Pittsburgh, Quaker Valley and Sto-Rox school districts; the Propel Schools charter education network; and Manchester Academic Charter School.

Student groups visit Alaquiva's Ya Momz House recording studio, where they are shown how academic subjects from English and history to science and math relate to hip-hop, such as when beats are counted in music. Participants also learn about different aspects of music production, such as writing, mixing and recording, as part of the hands-on experience of creating a mock record label.

Hip Hop on L.O.C.K. partners with various organizations, including the Hill House Association, Carnegie Mellon University and the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh, to recommend students for the after-school component of the program. That portion also involves development of a mock record label and includes other activities such as the online projects L.O.C.K.down Radio, a weekly talk show on the Carnegie Mellon University station WRCT, 88.3 FM, that's geared toward a hip-hop audience, and Waffle Wopp, a live teen magazine show. Waffle Wopp is broadcast from the Waffle Shop, a neighborhood restaurant around the corner from Hip Hop on L.O.C.K. that produces and airs live-streaming talk shows with its customers.

As part of the program's empowerment and community involvement efforts, students can participate in volunteer opportunities called "throwbacks," which are meant to get youth to "throw back" their gifts to the community, Alaquiva says. One project involved serving meals at The Covenant Church of Pittsburgh in Wilkinsburg.

Another involved five young people collaborating at Ya Momz House on a CD promoting the "Age Up, Not Out" program for those leaving foster care. Age Up, Not Out offers services such as mentoring, job training and placement, and helps youth as they leave foster care and are no longer eligible for state aid. The Hip Hop on L.O.C.K. project will culminate in an original song, a music video and a logo that Age Up, Not Out can use for marketing. Because of its community efforts, Hip Hop on L.O.C.K.

received a YWCA of Greater Pittsburgh Racial Justice Award for art in November.

Bivins, a Community College of Allegheny County philosophy major, heard about Hip Hop on L.O.C.K. through a career exploration initiative called YouthWorks. He believes that the hip-hop program has helped improve his concentration on his classwork and inspired his career choice.

"The more I write, the more I understand myself," says Bivins, who dreams of being a music producer because "that's where you get to create."

Hip-hop has done as much, if not more, for Alaquiva as it is doing for the youth he mentors. Depressed after his sister died from a terminal illness, he became homeless for about a year-and-a-half and lacked direction. Justin Strong, a young entrepreneur who owns a popular live music and performance night spot in Pittsburgh called the Shadow Lounge, hired him as a doorman and inspired him to open his own studio. Alaquiva considers hip-hop a personal game changer.

"I'm a testimony of how it works," he says. "Hip-hop gave me a foundation I didn't have. Hip-hop gave me discipline. Hip-hop gave me patience. For hip-hop to affect 15 students the first year and now 1,000 is testimony that it works."

Like Hip Hop on L.O.C.K., K.R.U.N.K. Movement uses the art form to expose students in ninth through 12th grades to the music industry; however, its focus is teens' physical and mental health.

The Rev. Tim Smith, whom students call PT, short for Pastor Tim, developed K.R.U.N.K. in 2004 as part of the faith-based Center of Life, a Hazelwood community empowerment organization. He first met with staff at the University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Public Health about a preteen and teen program. During discussions, the group realized that no matter the race, country or gender, hip-hop is "where it's at"—and not just the music.

"It's a subculture. It's a way teens are choosing to live their lives," says Smith.



**“FOR HIP HOP TO AFFECT
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Emmai Alaquiva, founder and executive director,
Hip Hop on L.O.C.K.



**“WE WANT THEM TO SEE
IT AS A LEGITIMATE
PATHWAY TO A CAREER.
IN MY GENERATION, IT
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Tim Smith, founder, K.R.U.N.K. Movement.

In his program, youth use the art form to emphasize positive messages. Even in the name, the letter “k” was swapped for the “c” in the slang word “crunk,” which usually means to get high. By making the change, the teens created the word “krunk,” which is intended to convey doing the right thing.

High school students meet weekly at Keystone Church of Hazelwood to brainstorm topics to rap about and to practice their songs and dances. Subjects include avoiding drugs and alcohol, abstaining from sex, dealing with suicide and depression, and figuring out what to do in an abusive relationship.

“All [youth] come in with edgy, hardcore lyrics,” says Smith. “We tell them we don’t use profanity. It comes with the hip-hop package. It’s part of the origins, but it’s not a must.”

They also learn that music is a business and to approach it that way. Smith, an investment banker before turning to mentoring and ministering, works with groups of 15 to 20 teens who perform at schools and other venues. They get paid at least \$50 for performances. Auditions are held and some get rejected. The students also write, compose and copyright their own music, selling CDs online. They learn that K.R.U.N.K. is a micro-enterprise, and the business is performance.

Because of the work that Lehigh University’s Peterson has done with hip-hop in the classroom, Smith selected him to design a curriculum for a six-week, mini-version of K.R.U.N.K., during which college interns train middle school students participating in the Pittsburgh Public Schools’ Summer Dreamers Academy. The K.R.U.N.K. program, which received \$75,000 from the Endowments and \$50,000 from Grable, is one of many providers of activities for the educational and recreational summer camp.

Over the years, hundreds of students have gone through the K.R.U.N.K. program, which also includes a jazz band component, with most of its graduates going to colleges such as State University of New York, Berkeley School of Music, and Duquesne and Point Park universities, according to Smith.

K.R.U.N.K. participant Thomas, who was an instrumental major at the Pittsburgh High School for the Creative and Performing Arts and now is a freshman at the California University of Pennsylvania, says her involvement in K.R.U.N.K. helped with her classroom performance.

“You have to have good grades to even be in the program,” says Thomas, who is planning a career in music production.

Her mother, Heather Sallis, applauds the program’s positive influence and likes the messages about staying in school, avoiding drugs and alcohol, and abstaining from sex. “Definitely [Bria] has grown as a musician being in K.R.U.N.K.,” Sallis says. “She was able to advance in her music production field. It’s given her a good base. She’s learned a lot working as a team and being a leader, teaching other [younger] kids.”

1Hood New Media Academy uses hip-hop to convey positive messages about African American males and to combat negative media images that portray them as thuggish and violent.

For six months, on the second floor of the sleekly modern, glass-encased August Wilson Center, casually clad young men in the academy sat at long tables, engrossed in the laptops before them as natural lighting illuminated the room. Creators Jasiri X and Paradise Gray started the media literacy project in the summer with \$40,000 from the Endowments and high hopes of showing African American male youth, ages 12 to 20, how to use hip-hop culture and new media to alter damaging stereotypes. The group



Photography by Jim Judkis



“TOO OFTEN AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN ARE VIEWED IN A NEGATIVE WAY BECAUSE THEY AREN’T IN CONTROL OF THE MEDIA.”

Jasiri X, co-creator,
1Hood New Media Academy

met twice a week, and students analyzed media messages, created hip-hop beats, and learned to blog and navigate Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to tell different stories about black men and boys.

“Too often African American men are viewed in a negative way because they aren’t in control of the media,” says Jasiri X, who has gained a national following with his melding of hip-hop and news on his Internet program “This Week With Jasiri X,” which Gray directs. Videos frequently extol a gangster lifestyle, an image sanctioned by media conglomerates that decide what gets played and what sells, whether it’s good or bad, Gray explains.

Jasiri X’s rap videos, however, broadcast on his program and elsewhere, address topics ranging from the beating of an unarmed black youth in Pittsburgh by undercover police officers to Wisconsin protests over Gov. Scott Walker’s crackdown on public unions. The AFL-CIO tweeted about the Wisconsin video, and Jasiri X was subsequently invited to speak before tens of thousands at a Teamster-sponsored rally. The experience was a testament to the power of new media to spread a message, and Jasiri X believes that, without YouTube, his video might have gone unnoticed.

Gray, a member of the socially conscious rap group X-Clan, also knows personally how hip-hop can influence youth for the better, crediting it with saving him from the South Bronx streets by allowing him to view life differently and understand how people are affected by media.

“It taught me how to think outside the box and to be creative and original,” he says. “Instead of following the trend, I get to set the trend.”

Because of their personal knowledge of the influence of hip-hop and media, the two men created the 1Hood New Media Academy to stimulate students’ thinking about media messages and their impact. The program included a broad reading list of books, ranging from Dr. Frances Cress Welsing’s treatise on racism, “The Isis Papers,” to Malcolm Gladwell’s examination of social phenomena in “The Tipping Point.” Students also viewed informative DVDs such as “HIP-HOP: Beyond Beats and Rhymes.”

Participant Matthew Evans, 20, says he has a greater understanding of how media works, and “the way the world is going toward the Internet... I always liked media, especially music and music production—that’s my passion,” he explains. “For me, I hope to gain enough knowledge to start my own blog or open my own studio. That’s how I think this class will help.”

Students are required to complete a final media project, with the goal to build young black men’s self-esteem and help them see that a positive image is just as marketable as a negative one.

“If the media don’t understand your moral standards,” says Gray, “it’s up to you to put across your own story.” *h*

“... AND WE TALKED ABOUT RHIANNA AND HER DRAMA TO DEATH TALKIN’ ’BOUT HER YOUNG FANS BUT SINGING RUSSIAN ROULETTE ALL THESE MEDIA DISTRACTIONS HAVE A CRUSHING EFFECT A BURNING HOUSE ALWAYS TAKES OUT THE ONES WHO SLEPT GOOD NIGHT.”

From “Silent Night (Do Rappers Watch the News)” by Jasiri X