

Letters to The President: An Urban Youth Literacy Civic Engagement Project



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Abstract

The tragic death of 15 year old Kiwane Carrington at the hands of Champaign city police and the youth activism in its wake has saddened and inspired all. Their activism highlights the national tragedy and increasing national trend of youth victims of violence. Recent national exposure of youth victim Derrion Albert in Chicago caused The President to send a representative to help facilitate solutions. This project allows youth to take advantage of this historical moment in a very unique way. This moment is where a Black U.S. President is considering and making statements about youth victims of violence in Midwest cities. This moment can be profoundly affected by empowering youth to offer their unique experience and informed perspectives in formal letters written to U.S. President, Barack Obama, and other elected officials at all levels of the government.

Project Goals

- To inspire further civic engagement by high school-age, violence-affected youth and similarly affected college-age youth.
- To help youth address public officials and government leaders to effect change.
- To improve youth literary and leadership skills.
- To expose youth participants to a rich cultural history of literary civic engagement and protest and struggle by African Americans around issues of youth affected by violence
- To introduce youth participants to a variety of professionals and experts on these issues
- To foster relationships between the Department of African American Studies (DAAS) faculty and University of Illinois students, local high school-age youth residents, local community institutions, and leaders.
- To engage the general public on the issue of youth victims of violence by presenting the unique perspective of urban youth

Program Participants

High School Age Youth

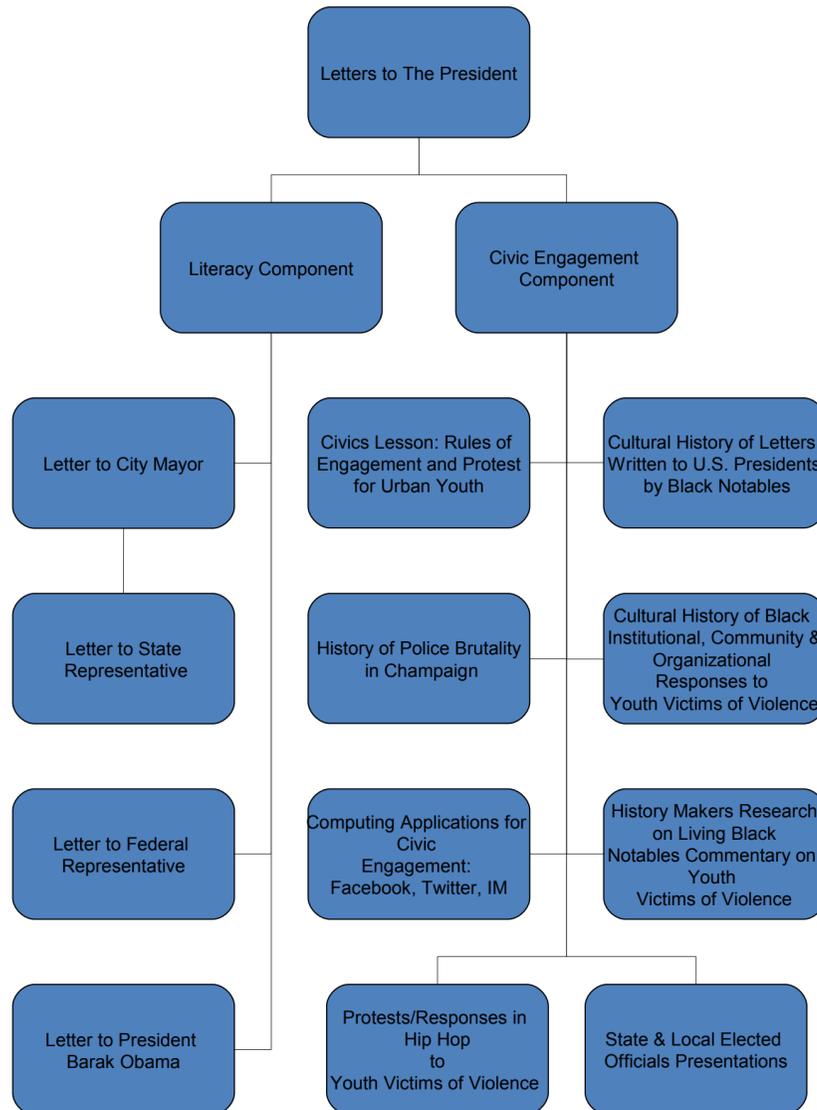
- N = 20
- GED Program
- Ready Alternative High School
- Urbana High School
- Centennial High School
- Central High School
- Boys and Girls Club
- YMCA
- Youth not in school

College Age Youth

- N = 10
- University of Illinois – 100 Strong
- Parkland College
- GED Program
- Youth not in school
- Barber shops and hair salons

Project Components

Weekly workshop sessions will be organized to produce four letters from each youth participant. These letters will address concerns around youth victims of violence. Speaker presentations and small group exercises will be used to promote team building and peer-learning between high school-age and college youth. This will also help to facilitate writing skill acquisition.



Expanding Campus Public Engagement

This project further expands our campus' public engagement capabilities by building partnerships between (DAAS) and Champaign-Urbana local community institutions from which youth participants may be drawn. These partnerships will continue through the youth participants who form relationships with DAAS faculty over the year long project.

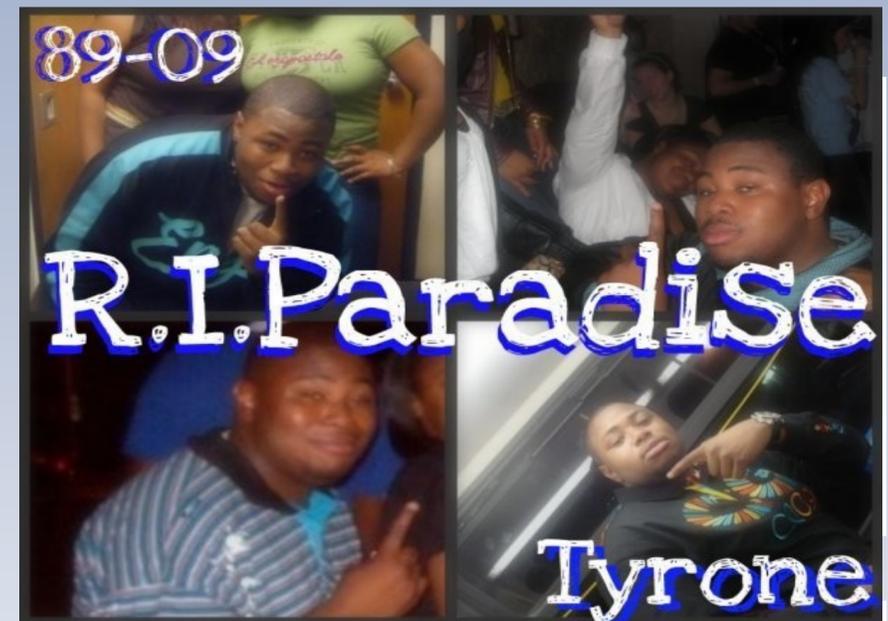
Public Engagement Products

The effect of this project extends beyond the boundaries of campus and Illinois by offering a written volume of all letters to The President authored by affected youth participants. This volume can be showcased outside the state and used to connect with other affected youth across the country.

Kiwane Carrington



Tyrone J. Williams



Acknowledgements

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Contact Information

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Letters to the U.S. President:

An Urban Youth Literary Civic Engagement Project



Recent events have highlighted the national tragedy of youth victims of violence and caused President Obama to send Representative Arne Duncan to Chicago to help facilitate solutions. This is a moment where a Black U.S. President is considering issues and making statements about youth victims of violence in Midwest cities. This moment can be profoundly affected by empowering youth to offer their unique and informed perspectives in formal letters written to President Barack Obama.

We would like to invite African American youth between 14 and 22 years of age to participate in ten weekly workshops to produce letters written to President Obama and elected officials at every level of government.

This is also a chance to learn about your rights, obtain guidance on how to engage in the civic process, develop your voice as a tool for creating social change, meet other youth, learn about college and graduate school, and to become a published author.

When: April 24 - June 26, 2010

Saturdays from 1 – 4 pm

Where: Boys and Girls Club

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