

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



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

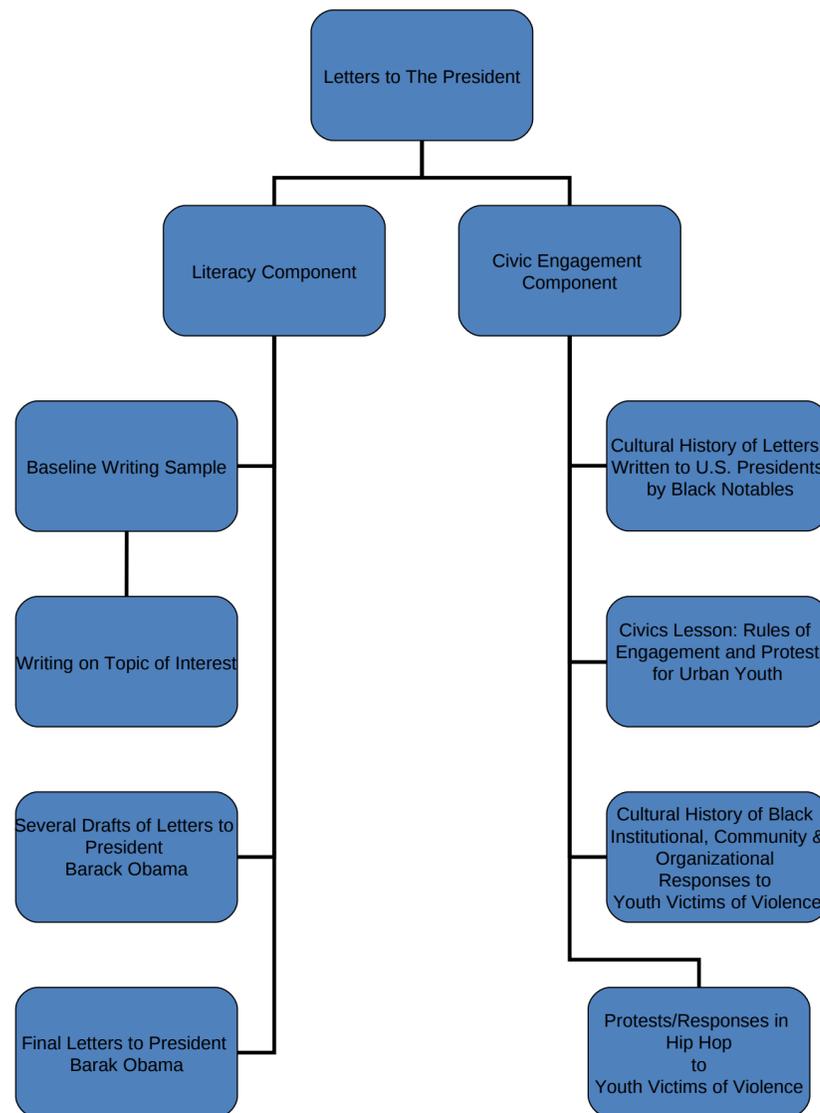
Program Participants

High School Age Youth

- N = 13
- Lincoln Challenge Academy
- Don Moyers Boys and Girls Club of Champaign-Urbana
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- Future Recruitment
- GED Program
- Ready Alternative High School
- Urbana High School
- Centennial High School
- Central High School
- YMCA
- Youth not in school

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.

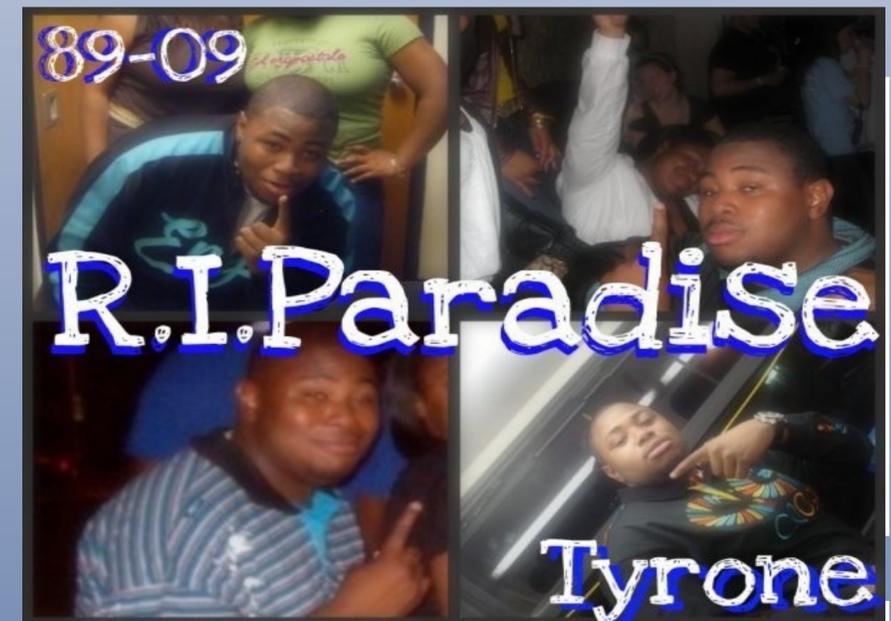
Public Engagement Products

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

All correspondence concerning this poster should be directed to: Ray Muhammad @rmuhamma@illinois.edu.

