

Workshop: How to Succeed in Hip Hop without Losing Your Soul with Jasiri X (29th MLK)

PAULA GROSS PRICE: OK, good afternoon. Thank you everyone for attending our workshop today, as a part of the 29th annual MLK community celebration. My name is Paula Gross Price, and I am the Associate Dean for Diversity and International Programs in the College of Education. We are honored today to have Jasiri X with us to engage in an inspiring workshop and dialogue on some of our most pressing issues facing our communities. This workshop, entitled How to Succeed in Hip Hop Without Selling Your Soul, will provide us the opportunity to hear Jasiri X's inspiring personal journey with hip hop and social activism. And like his music, I am certain that he will also push us to think critically about our own efforts to dismantle systems of white supremacy, power, and privilege, as well as how we can all work to change many of the negative perceptions that are out there about people of color and hip hop.

As a member of the MLK committee, we hope that each of you leave today's workshop inspired to take the messages back to your networks, and that you use your own power and influence for greater social justice. So let's give a warm Cougar welcome to Jasiri X.

JASIRI X: So what's the state of the black world? When the hood raised black boys and black girls, before you pass judgment on us, Jasiri X going to give you something to discuss. See, these streets will talk to you if you understand the language. Corners become famous the more blood they stained with, the more murals painted, when shells hit the pavement. We need three Jesuses to come and save this. We need Moses, Abraham, and David, all 12 disciples to wash away the blood on that hand that held the rifle. Because life so hard, he like whoever show their face tonight is getting robbed when your home is a grave. The street is a maze, and so many cats blaze, it's hard to see through the haze.

And crime pays way more than minimum wage, and plus the lead from the gauge will take a swim in your ways, loosen your braids, leave bald spots in your fade, like you got your haircut with some raggedy blades. The truth is, we're no better off than when we were slaves. Malcolm X and Dr. King probably spin in their graves. It's got to be the last days because I can't take no more. And these kids, they don't Harlem Shake no more. They're in the kitchen, cooking up kicks galore, kicking down doors like everybody face the floor. And they got guns that will make you shake and contort, and they don't shoot ball, they shoot .38s to sport. Getting tried as adults when they can't sit the court. Getting sent to state prison, getting raped, oh lord.

What did we do to deserve this condition? When we can't even function without herb in our system? And every hit we take from a spliff blurs our vision, and the next day just means another murder victim in the summer. Just means we're going to get dumber, coroners putting bodies under covers, and then between sheets like the Isley brothers. He told his mother that he loved the hood, but the hood will never love you. See, what's the state of the black world? When the hood raise black boys and black girls, before you pass judgment on us, Jasiri X going give you something to discuss.

Sup, y'all. How y'all doing? Peace. So that was a piece that I wrote. I actually went to a conference called The State of the Black World. And it was a lot of, like, elders there, and a lot of what you would call black leaders there. And I felt like as somebody coming from the younger generation, that a lot of the conversation towards us was really condescending. And it was kind of like a what's wrong with your generation? How come you all haven't followed through on these great gains that we made? And followed up with them? Why don't you just pull your pants up?

So I always say, wow, well, if young people don't know, whose responsibility is it? Is it those young people's responsibility for not knowing? Or is it the responsibility of those that have the knowledge to come and teach the young people who don't know what they know. And if there's nobody in our communities to teach us, then we really kind of almost in a sense become that-- I don't necessarily want to say a forgotten generation, but a generation that was kind of left to own devices in a sense. And so now we're rising up and do all these different things, and sometimes elders want to come out of the woodwork and criticize us.

Where were you over the past 20 years when we were dealing with the ramifications of a wave of crack cocaine hitting our communities, and what happened then? When all the jobs moved out of our communities and overseas? Where have you been? When our only options were hitting the block or maybe if you was a good athlete, or the Army. And that's all we kind of had to look towards. And so if social media, or television, or radio, or young people our own age are raising us, then this is what you're going to get.

So I would always put it upon particularly sometimes when you come to college, maybe some people are from Pullman, but sometimes you're coming from a community much different than the community you're coming into. And it's a blessing. I know it's difficult, particularly as a person of color, but at the same time, I feel like we have a responsibility to then take the knowledge and information that we learn back to the communities that we come from.

Particularly if they're depressed communities, economic depressed communities, we have that added responsibility.

Some might not agree. I feel the same way. As a hip hop artist, I feel like it's not enough for me to just be a conscious rapper. I feel like the stakes are too high, and the situation is too dire for me just to rap, and give you some good words that might make you feel good and make you think. I feel like I have a greater responsibility. And I feel like an artist of color, that I don't have I have the luxury to just make art for art's sake. Because I'm in a white supremacist system. You know what I'm saying? Like we're dying, we're being killed. We're suffering. Poverty in Flint, Michigan. They can't even turn the water faucet on. Primarily because it's a poor and black city. And so I can just say, hey, we going to hit the club. That's how I feel.

So how are you going? My name is Jasiri X. I want to thank Washington State university for having me. And I really want this to be a dialogue, this conversation, later on. It's funny, these are my two favorite topics, which is hip hop and race. So I'll kind of later on will be more of the talk. I would like this to be more of a conversation around hip hop. So if you have any questions or any comments, don't feel like you have to wait to the end in a question and answer process. I don't know if there's a microphone. I know it was [? banned ?] last year. I don't know if there's a microphone that we can bring into the crowd.

Oftentimes what I create and the type of music that I do is to create dialogue. And so this is all my social media. So when I leave, you could still have a piece of Jasiri X, like there he is, right there. So I would encourage y'all to do something-- I have a Snapchat. I haven't got into Snapchat yet. I know I almost have to. I speak at high schools. They like, yo, if you ain't on Snapchat, we not even looking at you. But it's a commitment to learn and develop another-- it's work. Doing social media is work. So I'm trying to, in my mind, decide whether or not. So I don't know if you pro or maybe against Snapchat. Maybe we can have a conversation later and you can convince me.

So this is kind of where to get me right now. Bandcamp, for those that's unfamiliar with Bandcamp, it's a music site. Some people use SoundCloud. I have SoundCloud too. I personally like Bandcamp better because you can monetize it. My new album is on Bandcamp right now. It's called *Black Liberation Theology*. Bandcamp allowed me to put a pay what you want option. So you could put zero. And you can download album. Financially, you might not be able to come up with, but you might want to hear it. Or you can donate whatever you want. So I've had people go from zero to \$50 to support the album. And then even if you put zero,

you still have to put your email address in.

And that's something that then I can take and then you going to get my newsletter until maybe you-- you could unsubscribe, I guess, if you wanted to. But if you don't, you going to get my newsletter once a month. At it kind of allows you to build this fan base outside of the current structure. And I also like to start with this because I'm an artist that came out of social media. Very nontraditionally how I came to find myself in Pullman. Never would've thought a few years ago that I would be here. So I took a very nontraditional route that I want to talk about, but I kind of came--

Do y'all remember Myspace? Y'all have Myspace pages? Remember like this how I learned a little bit of HTML, because I wanted my Myspace page to be cool, and you had to go in and make your page pop. So I came off of Myspace, and I came off of-- I had a Myspace music page. And basically I heard about a situation that happened in Jena, Louisiana, called the Jena Six. I don't know, do y'all remember the Jena Six? For those that don't know, just a quick summary, y'all heard of the term, "the wrong side of the tracks?" So in this community, in Jena, Louisiana, and I think at that time was 2005, 2006, it was a segregated community. They segregated communities in the south oftentimes with the train track. And so on one side of the train track in Jena was poor black people. On the other side was more affluent white people.

And at the high school in Gina, there was a tree that the unwritten rule was only white students were allowed to sit under the tree. Mind you, this isn't 1965, this is 2005. And so a black student sat under the tree, and some white students hung nooses from the tree, basically to say, no, this is our tree. So it caused a lot of racial tension in the school. And so the prosecutor of that county comes to the school, but he only comes to talk to the black students. And basically threatens the black students, like you all need to stop. I could end your life with a stroke of a pen.

And so unfortunately, the racial tension didn't stop. There was a party off campus that some white students had. A black student went and got jumped. Next day in school, some of the black students seen one of the guys that jump them, they jump him, and instead of getting suspended like the people who hung the nooses did, they were charged with attempted murder. Even though that student that they beat up didn't even spend one night in the hospital, they were charged with attempted murder, and one young man was given 10 years in prison. His name was Michael Bell. He had a college scholarship to go to LSU to play football.

Career over. You're in prison.

So this was the first time that I saw people begin to use social media to kind of spread the story. People were using Myspace, and changing their profile picture to information about the Jena Six. Some guy made a video just breaking the whole story down, and that kind of went viral on YouTube. And so I'm Pittsburgh, I hear about it. And at that time, I quit rapping, because I was told over and over again nobody wants to hear music with a message. Nobody wants to hear music with a message. When you hear that over and over again, and that was what I was interested in doing. I was interested in making music with a message, so I basically said, you know what? I'm done.

We were active in the community. We started an organization called One Hood. I'll get into that a little bit later. And so I was just being an activist. I heard about the Jena Six, and I said, you know, I'm going to write a song about this. And I wrote it, and I put it on my Myspace page. And I sent it to-- at that time, the website that I used was called AllHipHop.com. This was pre WorldStar, I believe. I don't know, WorldStar might have just began to emerge. And I have mixed feelings about WorldStar. If you want to talk about that, later on we can.

Somebody called me. I'm at my job. I was working for Pittsburgh Public Schools, and they called me, in they said, hey man, your song's on the front page of AllHipHop. And I thought I made it. I was like what? And so I left my job in the middle of the day because the school blocked those type of websites. So I left. I went home and was like, oh, I'm on the front page of AllHipHop.

And then I got a call from a radio show called The Michael Baisden Show, and they said we want to interview you. Now I didn't know at the time that Michael Baisden had the largest syndicated radio show in the country when it came to black audiences, that he was in every major black city in the country. And so he said my name Jasiri X, and I'm getting calls from people all over the country. Man, this is a big opportunity. So Michael Baisden played the song. He said it got such a response, he played it two times in a row. And it was like now I'm off. Now I'm in Jena, and I kind of became-- almost it became the anthem for this movement. And I appreciate Michael Baisden for playing it, even though I was at that time, I guess you would say I was a nobody. I was not a named rapper.

And so that kind of launched me, but what really changed my mind all the messages I got from people on Myspace. Particularly people from my generation, thanking me for making the song,

telling me how much the song affected them, what it meant to them, how it inspired them. And I really was like, I was lied to. They kept telling me that my generation didn't want to hear this type of music, but here's all these messages I'm getting from people all over the country, thanking me for creating a song like that. When I got to Jena, there was 60,000 people in Jena, Louisiana, that showed up with this massive protest, primarily people college age or younger that were there.

And so I was like, wow. So I began to work on the album I made. I created an album called *I Got That X*. It's on my Bandcamp if you want to check it out. And I was off. And I was kind of deciding as an artist what I wanted to do. And then another situation happened with a young man in New York City named Sean Bell. Does anybody remember the Sean Bell case? Where Sean Bell was a young man who he was getting married. So before you get married, him and the fellows go out, they have a little bachelor party. He's leaving the party, the club. He gets in his car, he goes to pull off, and he doesn't notice an undercover police officer was there.

Those undercover officers shoot 51 shots into Sean Bell's car, killing Sean Bell. He is unarmed. He didn't break any laws. He didn't have any drugs on him, or anything like that. Not that if he did, that would justify his murder. So the case went to court. Cops are found what? Not guilty. And so when they were found not guilty, all of a sudden, I start getting all these messages on Myspace. And people were saying you should write a song about this. Because I was the guy that did the Jena Six song. And initially, my thinking was I was reluctant, because I didn't want to be the tragedy rapper. I come out when something bad happens to the community.

But what caused me to want to write the song was that I didn't see any other mainstream rappers really addressing these type of topics. So when I did the Jena Six song, the hook was, call Wheezie, call Baby, call BG, call juvenile, many fresh call Master P. So the slim would have roled, but he in the ground. Somebody call young turkey about to get out. Call Romeo, he balling on a scholarship. Don't be silenced by record label politics. And people thought it was a diss, like oh, you were dissing Wheezie, and Wayne, and Master P. I was like, no. I was saying call them. I was encouraging them, because I felt like these young men who were in the Jena Six, these were the men who made you hot. These were the young brothers that supported you before you were platinum. These are the people that are you.

So I felt like it was 60,000 people in Jena, maybe if Wheezie was there, and Baby was there, and Master P was there, it might have been a million people. We might have been able to free

that brother that day, even though thankfully Michael Bell got out. He actually, I think, just graduated college. He's in law school. I'm proud of that brother and that he was able to do that. So I was calling on these artists. And so when I didn't see artists doing this type of thing, I made a song called "Enough's Enough," and it was the first video I had on WorldStar. Shout out to WorldStar for that. And it ended up leading to me doing a segment on BET's Rap City.

And so I'm seeing here I am, really speaking to these real issues that I want to speak about as an artist. And I'm also kind of getting my name out there to the point where I'm doing-- I'm becoming known. I'm buzzing. And it was kind of like, wow, this is interesting. So I feel like I was kind of recruited in a sense to be somebody that began to deal with these different topics that happen. Now, I'm from Pittsburgh-- well, no, I'm sorry. I'm from the south side of Chicago. Any Chicago folks in the house? No? Anybody been to Chicago? No, I'm just playing.

[LAUGHTER]

So just to give you a little bit of background as to also why I tend to discuss the topics that I talk about. So I'm originally from the south side of Chicago. My given name is Jasiri [? Aronde ?]. My mother raised me socially conscious, but I'm in a basically 100% black environment. I went to a Catholic school in Chicago, but outside of the fathers and nuns, all the students were black. And we ended up moving to a neighborhood in Chicago called Roseland. People in Chicago sometimes referred to it as the Wild Hundreds. And I began to explore the life that was outside of my door. My history was that Chicago is very much gang affiliated. I'm talking about going all the way back to Al Capone. It's just a gang city.

And so my mother saw me beginning to get into things that she didn't want. Specifically me. I have an older sister, but it was specifically the things that she saw me getting into. And so she moved us from the south side of Chicago to a suburb of Pittsburgh called Monroeville, Pennsylvania. So I went from a 100% black environment to a 95% white environment. And having racism hit you directly in the face. I remember the first time we went to the Monroeville mall, a drunk white person called us niggers. And I'm like, yo. [LAUGHTER] Where am I? I remember the first day of school, they were like, what's the biggest difference? I was like, all you white people. That's the biggest difference.

And so it was a difficult transition. After I realized, you can't fight everybody, those lessons that my mother taught me about Marcus Garvey, and Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, I began to, like, oh this is what she meant. And so we started a black club in our school called Our Cultures Club. We got our school to teach black history, and it showed me this is how we can

combat these different things. And so that's how-- and part of the reason why also I talk about the subject that I want to talk about. What do you all know about Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania? If I may ask you. Any Pittsburgh people here? No. Oh! Steelers, Steelers. You're a Pittsburgh Steeler fan? OK, so you felt our pain when they lost to Denver.

Besides the Steelers, what else you all know about Pittsburgh? Anybody? Yes.

AUDIENCE: Steel town.

JASIRI X: Steel town. It was. It is no longer a steel town now. It's much, much different. Yes.

AUDIENCE: Jazz musicians grew up there. Lots of black famous jazz musicians.

JASIRI X: True. Yes. Yes. Billy Eckstine. Yes.

AUDIENCE: You could go on forever.

JASIRI X: You can. And also Pittsburgh, when it came to the history of jazz, it was this place because it was in between New York and Cleveland. It was like, the people would come through Pittsburgh on their way to the rest of the Midwest. So Miles Davis used to live there at one time. So there's definitely an extensive history of jazz in relation to the city of Pittsburgh. George Benson, of course. Anybody else?

AUDIENCE: It's the poster child for hardworking blue-collar Americans?

JASIRI X: Really? OK, yeah, the poster child for hardworking-- OK, I'll take that.

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]

JASIRI X: Yes. Hyams, yes, yes. Any rappers from Pittsburgh that you all know of? You said somebody? Wiz, right? Wiz Khalifa. So that's pretty much-- usually, when I ask people that question, it's the Steelers and Wiz. That's it. That's pretty much people's understanding of Pittsburgh. Did you go that Pittsburgh was called America's most livable city? So interestingly enough, Forbes Magazine came in and said Pittsburgh was America's most livable city. The same year that Forbes Magazine called Pittsburgh America's most livable city, the United States census came up with a report that said Pittsburgh has the poorest working class black community in the country. So we're like, if it's the most livable city, who are you saying it's most livable for? So this was kind of the response. So this is my rep in Pittsburgh song that I want to play for you. It's called "America's Most Livable City."

[MUSIC - JASIRI X, "AMERICA'S MOST LIVABLE CITY."]

JASIRI X:

All right, all right. So that's "America's Most Livable City." So when I say tear down the projects and put up a Target, that actually happened in a neighborhood that I live in. I live in a neighborhood in Pittsburgh called East Liberty. And it was a neighborhood that had a lot of housing projects, and they tore the projects down, and they moved people out, then they put up a Target, put up a Whole Foods, put up at Trader Joe's. And it's like man, why do these good things can only happen to a community after you move us out of the community? Why does that have to be the case?

There's also a scene in there where you see a young man who has a neck brace on. That was a young man named Jordan Miles in Pittsburgh. And Jordan miles was an honor student at the performing arts school in Pittsburgh. He played the viola. But he lived in a neighborhood called Homewood. If you saw that thing that said "God lives in Homewood." And Homewood is a violent neighborhood. And he was walking to his grandmother's house. Every night he would go to his grandmother's house, because his grandmother didn't like to be in the house alone. And three undercover police officers approach Jordan Miles and say, where's the guns? Where's the money? Where the drugs?

Jordan, not being a street kid, thought he was being robbed. And so he tried to run, and of course the unwritten rule is don't run from the police. And when he slipped on the ice, police proceeded to beat him so badly that his mother didn't recognize him when she went to pick him up. You saw part of his head. They actually ripped the locks out of his hair. So if you can just imagine somebody with locks, in the force it would take to rip locks. Mind you, Jordan, 5'6" at the time, 130, 140 pounds. And these three officers were pretty big. One of the officers actually trained other officers in martial arts.

So that was a case where that federal government and the city of Pittsburgh decided not to prosecute those officers. Put them right back into a population of officers. Our police chief at the time, who was black, basically said it was a teachable moment, to teach young black people not to run from the police. And so that's kind of the environment oftentimes we're dealing with, and why I feel like it's important to not only speak to those different things, but also organize around them.

But that's also the cool thing about social media, is that you have a microphone with social media. Now, how you choose to use it-- [LAUGHTER] you could be positive. You can just troll

people all day long if that's what you want to do. You can pick the celebrity that you hate, and just bombard them with negativity. To me, that's a waste of time. That's not productive. Or, you could actually begin to respond to different things whether you like them or not. So we didn't just call a press conference to say, how can Pittsburgh be America's most livable city if the black people are the poorest in the community? But we did the video, and when we premiered the video, we actually had a forum in our community around the economic survival of people of color in Pittsburgh. And so you have that ability now to respond.

You could at the mayor on Twitter. I don't know if the president of Washington State University is on Twitter, but sometimes you can at the president and begin to talk about it. And sometimes, it's as simple as just you taking out your phone, and you kick in your rant in there about something you disagree with and don't like. And you could put that on Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat or whatever, and just that can go viral. So to me, it's giving people a voice and ways, particularly marginalized folks. When you look at the state of journalism, you look at the state of who's reporting on television, you don't see us a lot of times.

It's giving marginalized people, whether they black, brown, indigenous, LGBT, a voice now to speak about how we feel. You see that now with the whole conversation around the Oscars, which was started by a young woman that I follow, Rain of April on Twitter, that basically started the hashtag OscarsSoWhite. And this was two years ago. And then it starts this national conversation when this year there's no people of color nominated, to the point where every major actor now is being asked about the diversity or lack thereof. And this is a person who went on Twitter, created something, and began a conversation. And now they're talking about the Academy is going to be more diverse. This is the power that we have now. To me, if you begin to be consistent and utilize it properly. So shout out to Rain of April on that.

But also too, I feel like it needs to be kind of a virtual piece, and then also a real life organizing piece. So for us, it's one thing to create videos online that some may go viral. It's another thing to deal with real life situations that's happening in our community. So we started an organization called One Hood. And the concept and idea was twofold. One, when we started One Hood, it was 2005. It was around time where even though I find the term "black on black crime" problematic, people commit crime where they live. The percentage of blacks committing crimes against blacks is similar to the percentage of whites committing crimes with whites. But we don't say white on white crime.

But at that point, we led the nation in violence in our own community, Pennsylvania. And per capita, Pittsburgh was just as violent as a city like Philadelphia. That violence a lot of times is neighborhood by neighborhood, street by street. And we just felt like it's foolish to-- all of us are dealing with poverty. All of us are dealing with failing schools, lack of affordable housing, violence, policy brutality. But we take our frustration on one another. And so we felt like it would be better for us to come together in unity and begin to deal with the root causes of what's really happening in our communities. So we started an organization called One Hood. And it was black and gold. Of course, if you know Pittsburgh, black and yellow.

And the idea was for us to begin to use hip hop as a way to bring these different communities together. Regardless of whatever beef everybody may have, everybody got a rapper. Or everybody got a record label. Everybody was trying to do some type of hip hop. So we began to use hip hop as a way to bring these communities together. Well in 2010, the Hyams Foundation actually did a study about how black men are portrayed in the media in Pittsburgh. What they found was 90% of the time, when they show a black man in the media of Pittsburgh, what do y'all think the subject is?

AUDIENCE: Crime.

JASIRI X: Crime, yes. 90% of the time. If you add sports, it's almost 100% of the time. They said when it came to quality of life stories about black men, it was less than 3%. And so we saw this, and at that time I started to have success, me and this gentleman right here. This young gentleman with the beard. I don't know if y'all see that young guy with the beard. For those who are fans of-- I don't even like to use the term "old school hip hop." That's another problematic term. Classic hip hop.

He was in a group called X Clan that came out in the late '80s, early '90s. Prior to that, he was an entertainment director at a club called the Latin Quarters in New York, that actually gave lot of the rappers like LL Cool J, [? Care ?] [? As ?] [? One ?], and Public Enemy their first show. And so he ended up being in Pittsburgh, and so as this sage of wisdom particularly in hip hop history, this is the story of the creation of hip hop. The creation of hip hop happens at a time when there's a lot of gang activity happening in New York City. And it just so happened that one of the leaders of one of the biggest gangs, a guy at that time named Kevin, won an essay writing contest to take a trip to Africa. Comes back from Africa, and changes his name to Afrika Bambaataa, and changes the name of the Black Spades to the Zulu Nation. And begins this process of utilizing his organizing skills. I would argue that he could be called the greatest

organizer in our generation. But he began to use it to organize safe spaces where instead of fighting, we could rap, and we could DJ, and we could break dance, and we could do graffiti. In the pantheon of those godfathers of hip hop, in my humble opinion, Afrika Bambaataa stands out because of that, and because of the organization that still exists. The Universal Zulu Nation still exists all over the world. So definitely shout out to him.

And so we basically went to the Hyams Foundation and said, hey, we've had success creating the videos. I did a video called "What if the Tea Party was Black?" That went viral, if you want look that up, check that out. And so we said, hey, we've been getting millions of views on YouTube. We would like to teach young black man how to analyze media, and create media for themselves. And so they gave us an initial funding to do One Hood Media Academy. And so this is the initial part of it.

And then we had this young-- can y'all see that? That's kind of dark. I don't know if we can lighten that up. But there's a young woman throwing up the deuces. I don't know if y'all see her. Her name's Patience. I call her our One Hood's Rosa Parks. She came to One Hood one day, and she didn't care that it was all young men. She said I want to be a part of One Hood. And what are we going to do, kick you out? We were like, OK, well. So we went to our funders and said, hey, can we open up One Hood to young women? And now this is what One Hood looks like.

And it really became not just a media academy, per se, but it's also really become a collective of artists and mentoring young artists. Me saying that, for instance, as a rap artist, I'll get questions like this. Well you know, Jasiri, you're from Chicago originally. What do you think about Chief Keefe? And so a rapper like Chief Keef now becomes the poster child for destruction of hip hop. When he comes, as a 16-year-old from one of the most violent neighborhoods in the world, and trying to figure out what's happening in his neighborhood, and utilizing his voice to speak about the situation that he sees. He didn't create gangs. Chief Keef didn't start gangs. He didn't create drill music. He didn't even come up with the term "Chiraq." That was another rapper in Chicago named King Louie that actually coined that term, "Chiraq," "Drillinois," but he didn't create the environment. He just called it what he saw it.

Policies created that environment. Who's more responsible for the state of Chicago, Chief Keef or Rahm Emanuel? But this is how this conversation begins to go. And so my response is well-- and I'll tell people when they ask me this. I said, the people that make the decisions in hip hop as to who gets signed and who gets funded, they don't look like me. Normally they look

like the people who's asking me the questions. They're old white men. It was Jimmy lovine that decided to give Chief Keef \$6 million. And now if I'm a young rapper in Chicago, what do I do then? What type of music do I decide to make when I see a rapper like Chief Keef get 6 million, and I live in an economically depressed environment. And I just want to get me and my family out.

And so to me, we wanted to also utilize what we're doing to begin to change the conversation and empower ourselves. Anybody, I just want to start. Any questions, comments? Yes.

AUDIENCE:

So when you're talking about creative artists, are you also doing graffiti, DJ, breaking?

[INAUDIBLE]

JASIRI X:

Right now, it is that. Although we have affiliates, we call them cousins, One Hood cousins. So we have a group called the Get Down Gang that does break dancing, that any time we have an event, we going to call the Get Down Gang. We have Mirrorless. We have a guy named Cal Holbrook, who actually goes all around the country and the world and does murals, but based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. So we have done murals. We actually did an incredible mural project with the Andy Warhol Museum, called "Don't Let Him Get Away With Murder." We actually did the silk screening. So we've done stuff like that. But the majority is kind of the mentorship of younger artists.

It's one thing, like I said, to be critical, but it's like a young person is only going to rap about what they know. And so what we felt like-- and initially, I'm going to be honest, initially when we started One Hood Media Academy, I kind of was arrogant. I was like, man, I'm going to school these young dudes. I'm going to drop so much knowledge on them, I'm going to blow their minds.

And I remember early on, we were having a conversation about the Occupy Movement. And one of my students said, well Jasiri, I mean, this is just an oligarchy anyway. And I was like, what? What is he, 60? How you know that word? What? And it caused me to realize that the younger people I'm dealing with are far more aware, and I think far more aware than sometimes we give them credit for being. We make assumptions about them based on how they look, or how they dress, or how they carry themselves. And so when I realized that, we realized that all we really had to do was give the information. So what we do is we come into One Hood, we have food, and we'll show a video about whether it's police violence, or whether it's about economic issues, or what's happening in Flint with the water crisis. What's happening

over here. And then we just have a conversation about it.

And then at that point, when these young artists get into the booth, we don't have to say rap this way. Because then that will be fake. There are some programs like that. It's like, oh, we're going to do the Martin Luther King rap. He was peaceful. He was-- it's corny. It becomes corny. We're all going to dress up in suits. No, we don't do that. We also decided not to censor our artists. We use profanity. And it's like, how can you have a-- to me, you can't have a real conversation about rap music, and not play things that have profanity. You're just not going to do that. And so we give our parents a waiver, like we're going to play things-- we're not going to be gratuitous. I said that today. That was my question. Can I cuss up in here? Not going to be gratuitous, but just to know that I'm free to express myself if I want to make a point.

And so that's the same thing we do. And so we allow our students the freedom to speak how they want to speak. We don't coach them. All we do is provide them the information. And I feel like that can change the dynamic of what an artist raps about. Once they know, once they become informed, once they become aware. And also the power that their music can affect them. I always tell my students, when you approach, when you put something out on social media, or YouTube, or anything like that, you're speaking to the world. People in China can see you. People in Afghanistan can see you. People in Africa can see you. So if you're going to speak to the world, what are you going to say? And understand, how are you going to represent yourself, your family, your community, where you come from as you enter this space where you speak to the world?

So right now, although-- I can get long-winded. That's why I told them, I was like, just give me some type of signal, because I can talk about this all day. So we don't engage in all necessarily, in the structure of our classroom. But we do, at this point, we would like to teach a DJ part of it. We're actually looking at dance. We have students that dance incredibly well, that want to have a dance portion of One Hood Media Academy. And so we're talking to somebody right now that does dance, to see if he's willing to come teach it. And of course, we want to be able to pay him for this time.

That's another thing. We pay our students for everything that they do. Every performance that our students engage in, we pay them. If they do anything, graphics or whatever. And what we try to do is move students from being a part of the class into being a teaching artist. And we really are trying to show them that there is an entrepreneurial aspect to getting on. You can take your talents and gifts, and actually make it a career, I know because that's what I did.

And I left the Pittsburgh Public Schools because the more political my music got, the more heat I started to get at my job. So it wasn't that I wasn't good-- this is why systems fail. It wasn't that I wasn't good at my job, or my students didn't like me. It was that you don't like when I was doing in the community and what I was saying when I began to do this rap. And so they kind of targeted me to be fired. And I was dumb at the time. I should have just let them fire me, and then collect unemployment. I wasn't thinking like that. I came in one day, and I said you know what? My office felt like a prison. And I said I'm leaving. And they had actually hired somebody to watch me. It got really bad. So I just handed the lady my keys to my office, and said I'm out. And I'm not saying that you should do that. Give your two week notice.

But I remember the last direct deposit check, and me saying now I got to go and make something happen. And then looking after that year was over, and seeing that I had made twice as much doing what I love to do than I made at this job that I enjoy interacting with the students, but I didn't like the politics of it. I would encourage you. I know you all are in college life. And the job market isn't where it was. It used to be like you was almost guaranteed. Go to college, get a degree, get a job. It's not like that anymore. So I would encourage you to, one, use this opportunity and time to find out what you're passionate about and what you love to do. And then use these resources to try to build an actual business around what you love to do. And then you don't work a day in your life because your doing what you love. I do this all day long, and I travel all over the country, and I get paid to do it. I'm surprised. But it's a blessing. I'm literally happy about that. So I would encourage you all to do that as well. Yes, sir, my Pittsburgh Steeler fan.

AUDIENCE:

Being raised, actually born in New York, [INAUDIBLE] rap, rap music [INAUDIBLE] started in the '70s. And it wasn't really violent, let's say. Then you get into the '80s, and then you have the NWA guys doing their thing. And so it's all known as rap. The thing that's a little bit confusing is you've got rap going on, and how does it turn into hip hop? You say hip hop, because you know back in the '70s, you had those places in the boroughs where they were doing rap. So sometimes that hip hop gets lost. Where's hip hop? Is it the same as rap? When I heard your thing, it sounds like rap to me, and you're saying it's hip hop. And I'm not arguing with you, I just-- I get confused.

JASIRI X:

No, that's a great question. No, because I sometimes will assume that somebody knows, and the fact that you came and asked that question shows me-- and it kind of goes back to the gentleman's question. Hip hop is the entire culture. So rap is a piece of it. And hip hop was

coined by Afrika Bambaataa. So when I say hip hop, I'm not just talking about rap. I'm also talking about graffiti. I'm talking about break dancing. I'm talking about DJing. I'm also talking about one element of hip hop that Afrika Bambaataa said, that a lot of times we forget, is knowledge of self. So all of this comes under the banner of hip hop.

It just so happened that rap was given preeminence because of its ability to make money. And we live in a capitalistic society. And so rap makes the most money for corporations. And so that's why rap gets held up outside of others. So I like to use the term hip hop because it gives the listener the idea that it's part of a culture. Because if it wasn't for the DJ, it wouldn't be a rapper. It was that the culture of hip hop is that ecosystem that then begins to produce rappers, and DJs, and graffiti artists, and break dance, but also activists as well.

AUDIENCE: So, hip hop. Where does that relate to the Zulu Nation and Afrika?

JASIRI X: Right. He coined the term "hip hop." I don't even know what came-- I would assume hip hop came before even rap. The only thing, like I said, people began to take rap because rap was that MC that can go and make a record, and they could play that record. Now, just to deal with your point, when you talk about from-- and this is another great question. From Kool Herc and all those people, and then you get to NWA. Well, what happened in between that? Well, a big thing happened. Well, I would argue that well, you had a president named Ronald Reagan. Comes into power, and begins to change the economic conditions of our community. Then you had the Iran Contra scandal. And you had the crack epidemic hit our community starting in the west coast.

I would encourage you to read a book if you're interested in how crack cocaine comes. It's a book called *Dark Alliance*. It was written by an author name Gary Webb. They just actually did a movie about Gary Webb called *Kill the Messenger*. That he ends up reporting on the government's connection with allowing crack cocaine to come into our communities, and then taking the profits and buying weapons from Iran to give the Contras in Nicaragua.

He exposes this thing, and of course he was demonized. He was criticized. He was basically called crazy, and of course, it came out that it was all true. And then he dies mysteriously as well. And so I would encourage you not just to watch the movie *Kill the Messenger*, which is a good movie, but his book *Dark Alliance* breaks down how the DEA, who's supposed to protect us from drugs, come into community actually aided people like the original Rick Ross, not the rapper Rick Ross, but Freeway Ricky Ross, to become one of the first crack multi-millionaires.

And so I think sometimes we look at that, and like I said, we place the blame on the rapper, and we miss the context. Because NWA was reporting on an environment that they did not create, but that they were a part of. And so the violence coming out of that is a product of a violent community in which they, as young people, have to begin to try to navigate. So watch the movie, *Straight Outta Compton*, which is-- thus, of course, "Fuck the Police," one of the greatest rap songs of all time comes out of NWA.

So I would say, watch the movie *Straight Outta Compton*. It's a really good movie. Great, great acting. Whoever played Dr. Dre, I feel like he should have got nominated. He was incredible. And that'll give you a little more context of NWA as well. Any other questions? Yes.

AUDIENCE:

As a Denver scholar, I'm often disheartened by many forms of music, objectifying women, the inherent sexism, misogyny, all of that fun stuff. Can you speak to that a little bit? Not just in hip hop. I guess in music in general, and what your thoughts are on that?

JASIRI X:

My thoughts are we're a product of a society that teaches us to objectify women. We're about to go watch the Super Bowl, and when you watch all those commercials, you see-- what's the woman who's the NASCAR driver? And she's on the Go Daddy commercial, but it's not showing her skill as a driver. It's showing her in the scantily clad-- And not to say that a woman can't be proud of how she looks, or have ownership of her sexuality. But oftentimes, the sexuality of women is used to sell products. And so now, we're a part of this world, and we come up, and we turn the TV on, and we watch this. I've heard people say, we might not have high speed internet if it wasn't for the success of pornography and how much money pornography makes in this country. So I think these are all--

Me, as somebody who tries to not objectify women, I still do it. I still do an and act in ways that are misogynistic. Thankfully, I'm around a strong group of women that will check me, starting with my wife. But I still have to sometimes come out of this mindset. And so we're a product of it. And so then when we speak, oftentimes that's what you hear. And this is to me, I've become educated by the voice of women, particularly women of color on social media, about issues in regards to gender politics.

Most of what I learn is coming from women that are utilizing their platform to really educate people when it comes to things like street harassment, that I just don't know about. How am I conditioned as a man, OK, if you see a good looking woman, hey baby, what's up? Can I get your number? That's how we're conditioned. Not thinking that you might not want to talk to me.

Or you have the right to say get out of here, and I can't be offended by this.

And so now what's coming out of it, I feel like people are beginning to address that topic more and more in hip hop. And there's also this piece of where are the women rappers? And they're where the conscious rappers are. They're everywhere. But they're not in the major label system, unfortunately. Major label system seems to operate in a way where they feel like only one different person can fill the space at one time. So it's like only one white rapper can fill the space. So we have Eminem, and now Macklemore. He can fill the space, but only one at a time. Only one woman. We got Nicki Minaj, but she's the only one. It's weird that it works like that.

But I always tell people when you want-- I travel a lot. I use an app called Yelp. If I come to Pullman and I want to know where a good restaurant is, I have two options. I'm done. But I could look at Yelp, or I could do the research on the internet, or I could ask somebody from that area. It's the same way with hip hop. One of my favorite artists is a young woman from Atlanta named [? Cy ?] Rock. I feel like when it comes to lyricists, ain't nobody messing with her. But she's somebody that because of how she carries herself, and what she says, it's a major label-- maybe they will. Maybe with the success of Kendrick and J. Cole and these other artists. So these are some of the people that I will point other folks to. But it's really asking people, are there any artists addressing these issues, and gender policies, and more than likely there are, and some doing it very well. So unfortunately, we got to really deal with--

And this is what people are pushing back on, the culture of America. This white male supremacist system, which I'll get into a little bit later when we talk about Doctor King and how Doctor King is used but not followed. So yeah, but thank you for that. This gentleman right here, you had a question?

AUDIENCE:

Thank you so much for coming to talk. We really-- [INAUDIBLE] I'm really interested in how you talked about earlier, bridging this generational divide or gap that you've seem to found between older generations, maybe coming from the Civil Rights or right after that, and then now the hip hop generations. And one of the things that you started to mention was how some of your songs are more call to action for other artists, either established artists or up and coming artists. So I was wondering if you could speak to how you've tried to continue that call to action, either through One Hood. Has this organization reached out? Or do you think about expanding and reaching out to other artists that could serve either as mentors, or ways and just building that kind of momentum?

JASIRI X:

Absolutely. I've been blessed to have mentors. I was talking to brother, I think, Keith who picked me up. From Mississippi. One of my mentors is David Banner. Actor, producer, rapper. He has an album coming out called *The God Box*. It's incredible. Another artist I've done a lot with is a rapper named Rhymefest. For those that might not know, or maybe remember Rhymefest, per se, Rhymefest-- because he's known more for his writing. Rhymefest has a Grammy for co-writing "Jesus Walks." He's written on every Kanye project except for *808s & Heartbreak*. He also has an Oscar and Golden Globe for co-writing *Glory* with Common and John Legend.

And so he's not only an incredible artist, but he has an organization in Chicago called Donda's House, which is named after Kanye's mother. Kanye's on the board. They do similar work that we do around building young people up artistically. He kind of came at Spike Lee, which I felt was justified, over the movie *Chi-Raq* in a very strong way. And really called it on Spike too. If you're going to utilize that term, put some resources back in the city of Chicago.

As well as, I have somebody like Dream Hampton, who's an author, and was a writer at The Source Magazine. Now is a filmmaker and doing incredible things. To somebody like Rosa Clemente, who's a hip hop academic scholar activist. Somebody that I would say, if she hasn't been here, somebody that I would say the people would benefit.

And then when it comes to generationally, sometimes I feel like the generation thing is also the mentality. Because my OG is Harry Belafonte. And I've been interacting with Harry Belafonte since 2005. He started an organization called the Gathering for Justice, and I was blessed to be a part of it. Harry Belafonte sent me to Ferguson. At that time, because of what was happening in the street, he's 88, and so he couldn't physically go. But he sent myself. He sent a young woman named Carmen Perez, who was executive director of the Gathering for Justice, to go. And he wanted to see who he could support, what young leaders he can put resources behind. And so to me, sometimes it also is not generational, it's really a mindset.

He just recently started an organization called Sankofa. If you go to Sankofa.org, and it's really, he's inspiring artists and encouraging artists to utilize their art and their fame to begin to talk about social justice issues. One artist recently that has been involved is Usher. He just did a song about police brutality. And he's shooting a video around it. He's been doing some things in the community as well. Some people saw when they did the conversation and Jay Z came. Because Mr. Belafonte and Jay Z had a little thing. That's [? debted. ?] We all coming

together in unity and peace and love. That's something that I would look at. So absolutely. Yeah, we're definitely doing that generational piece, as well, and doing that work. Thank you for that. Yes, you had a question? Or you were just point to your-- Yeah, I thought I saw you do a move. How much time do I have? I'm good. OK.

So this is another thing that I kind of do, that I feel like contributes to some of the success that I have. One day, one of my mentors is, to me I believe, one of the best hip hop journalists. His name's Davey D. He's from the Bay Area. He has a radio show called Hard Knock Radio on KPFA. And he called me one day, and he said, bro. He said I was DJing a high school, and I played some of your music, they wasn't feeling it.

And he was saying, it's not that they wasn't feeling it because it was good. They weren't feeling it because they didn't recognize it. And he was like, what you all need to do is take some of these beats that people recognize, that these companies spend multimillion dollars promoting and getting into the minds of people, and you should take those, and put some social consciousness on them. So when I do the song Trayvon, if you ever heard the song that I did around Trayvon Martin, I'll probably perform it later on tonight, I use "No Church for the Wild."

And so when you hear that beat, you hear "No Church for the Wild," but then here I come, and I'm rapping. Interestingly enough, it was just taken off of YouTube because of title. Title comes in, and you know Jay Z. He's not going be pimped. I like Jay Z. He's going own it. I give him credit for that. So you can't find it online anymore. Well, I mean, there's a live version, but the original version, because of Jay Z. Maybe we can appeal to Jay Z to put it back on.

So this is a song. I took Drake's-- actually, this was inspired by a group called The Dream Defenders. I don't know if you're familiar with The Dream Defenders. Amazing group that came out of the movement around Trayvon Martin. After George Zimmerman was found not guilty, they occupied the Florida State House for 30 days. And so when Jordan Davis, who was killed because he was playing loud music, and this guy thought he had the authority to tell them to turn it down, and when they didn't, shot up the car, killing Jordan Davis. When Jordan Davis, when he was found guilty of attempted murder, but not the murder of Jordan Davis, The Dream Defenders started this incredible meme called "America Never Loved Us," and using the hashtag NeverLovedUs, which was a play on Drake's song.

So I called my brother Umi, who was executive director of Dream Defenders. I say hey, man. I'm about to take this beat. Y'all got me inspired. And so, shout out to them. So I did this son

called "Never Loved Us." And shout out to Drake, too. I know that just because we're both light-skinned, don't mean we look alike. All light-skinned people don't look alike. Shout out to Drake, though.

[MUSIC - JASIRI X, "NEVER LOVED US"]

JASIRI X:

Remember. All right. Actually, the first case talked about in there, where we had all of the shirts on, was another case in Pittsburgh with a young man named Leon Ford. Leon Ford was driving in a neighborhood in Pittsburgh. Police pulled him over. He had a Lexus, which was his. He gave the police his license, which was up to date and fine. And gave the police his registration. But for some reason, the police felt like this could not be this person. This is a the state issue Pennsylvania ID. So the police go back into the computer, and instead of putting in Leon Ford, they put in L. Ford. And they pull up another guy, who had a warrant. And so they decide, this must be L. Ford.

And so they come back to the car, and a couple of things they didn't do. They didn't tell Leon to turn his car off. So he was sitting, and he had his foot on the brake. And so the police officer comes over, and says, get out of the car. And he's like what are you-- I gave you my ID. I gave you my registration. What's the problem? Police officer proceeds to pull-- to try to pull Leon Ford out of the driver's seat through the window. As his foot lifts off on the break, the car starts to move. Now when the car starts to move, no officers are in front of the car, or in any danger. One of the officers jumps into the backseat, and shoots Leon four or five times. Thankfully, he lived, but he's paralyzed from the waist down.

Leon was charged with assaulting a police officer, a case that he beat. So now he has a civil trial. He has a website called Justice for Leon. He will be another person that he's an incredibly positive, and he's actually using his influence as he became known in the city to come into our communities, to mediate some violence and beefs in our community. A very positive and powerful young man. So shout out to Leon Ford. And one of the reasons why those Justice for Leon shirts, just a real quick on that. He was utilizing social media for his case in such a powerful way that during his trial, they actually issued a social media blackout. They would not allow him to use social media during the trial. The first day of trial, 200 people showed up in the courtroom. And if you had a Justice for Leon shirt, they made you leave. And it was all of this whole thing. Yeah, that's the environment that they were in, but also the power of social media.

But also, like I said, I'll use those. A lot of times, somebody don't invite me in. Particularly if I'm coming into a neighborhood. The most difficult audience is young black people. Because you know, the teacher might be excited, like, I've got a rapper named Jasiri X. They like, I don't know Jasiri X. Who's Jasiri X? And so when I play this beat, it's something that they recognize. And then as I start to kick what I kick over this beat, it creates like, oh, OK, that's cool. OK, you all right. You decent. All right, let's have a conversation now. Drake hasn't came for that beat. I just did another one to another Drake beat. He just got good beats.

I just did "Preach." If you heard, "If you're reading this, it's too late." I just did that. So I'm going to drop that I think on my birthday, February 15. Yeah, what, that's your birthday? February 15th? Oh, snap, we got to go hang out a little bit. Aquarius season. Real quick, this is showing kind of like what we do for One Hood. We also help students get their product out. So this is actually one of our teaching artists, Black Rap Madusa. When it comes to a young woman coming with some real lyrics, she's also Muslima. And she actually just left us. She went to Atlanta. But shout out to Black Rap Madusa. That's her project. You can get that on iTunes.

This is a young man named Apollo. His project is called Ill Lucidity. He just actually graduated from a performing arts school in Pittsburgh. His project starts off and he's dreaming. And then at the end of it, he wakes up. It's a real, real dope project. This is another one of our graduating seniors, he still works with us, named Tyhir Frost. His album is *IDOL*, I Depend On Life. And then that's my new project, *Black Liberation Theology*. If you want to check it out. So this is actually a song that we did together. When you saw that picture of all of us, we did a video called "Young, Gifted and Black." So this isn't just me. This is some of the other One Hood MCs. So I definitely want to show this to y'all. And we can get in some more questions.

[MUSIC - JASIRI X, "YOUNG, GIFTED AND BLACK"]

JASIRI X:

So we actually put that on Facebook, and a lot of people were sharing it, and it got a lot of views. It was beautiful to see an idea come to fruition, and then the students get excited, because people are listening to them. And the last guy that rapped, his name is Luc, L-U-C, love unconditional. That shirt that he had, that's actually his own clothing line. It's called Voodoo.

And so also just trying to encourage our students, and really push our students to begin to produce things, and just be as creative as possible. Any other questions? Comments?

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]

JASIRI X: Oh, that's Tyhir Frost. Yeah, he came up. Coming through the door. Tyhir, it's funny. He came to One Hood with the belief that he was the greatest rapper of all time. He had never been in a booth before. And so when he got into a booth, he struggled a little bit. And we were hard on him. We gave him that tough love, but he was so determined. Part of being a good rapper is you have to have confidence. You have to have a high level of confidence. And so, I would encourage you, his project is on SoundCloud. If you go to Tyhir Frost on SoundCloud. Check out his newer stuff, because I feel like he's even better than what you see there. And he really become a student of the game.

He just went to college. He's working on his new project called *Dorm Room Thoughts*. And I've heard a little bit of it. I'm excited about what he's producing as well. Yes, sir. Oh, wait. I forgot. Before you ask the question, we need to get you the mic, because if you ask a question, that was my fault. Without the mic, the people on the live stream can't hear you.

AUDIENCE: Yeah, OK. So, your topic that I saw was talking about how to do music and keep your integrity. And when you look, being a retired musician of too long, and looking back with-- when you look at Duke Ellington, and you look at Louis Armstrong, who were backed by gangsters. And then you go and you find out cats like James Brown got screwed over by his people who are trying to abuse him and the whole nine yards. We find out that the record producers, the people who are in charge, they decide whether you're going to be a hit or not. And so it seems like you're doing independent. And how do you-- and I know they still have people saying, they got this one day at the hood. We got to get them out of business. Do you feel that happens to you from other companies around the country, or they're trying to push you out?

JASIRI X: Well, not really. What happened, the music industry, it really is gone. What you're seeing of the music industry right now is really almost like a dying animal. Kind of like we see the fish. If we take the fish out of water and it's flopping, that's what we're watching with the music industry right now. It's really gone. Like the music industry that we knew. When's the last time you turned on the radio and you discovered a new song by listening to whatever radio station you're listening to? And then you went and bought the-- I go back. Remember there was the cassette singles? We don't even consume music like that anymore. Oftentimes, the way music is being consumed--

The internet totally changed that. And this is one of the things that props to Steve Jobs. When

Steve Jobs came to the record industry with iTunes, they dissed him. And he did it, and now it really put them in a very-- that really became the death of the industry. So they just don't have that power. Being played on the radio doesn't really matter anymore.

To me, what J. Cole recently did, where last year, he announces maybe two weeks before he puts out the project, oh, I'm putting out this album you know *2014 Forest Hill Drive*. And he put one-- I don't even know, he might not have even put the video out. It maybe came out maybe a few days before the album dropped. It wasn't a push to get a record on the radio. And he puts this album out, and it's so good that he becomes the first artist in, I think maybe they said, 20 years to go platinum without any features. That's how good his project was.

Kendrick Lamar just put out a project called *To Pimp a Butterfly*. I didn't hear it being played a lot over the radio, some of the singles that he put out. But that still was an impactful project, and sold well. So the control that the record industry-- then there's this whole other thing about streaming, and how the economics of streaming is happening. So to me, if there are any rappers in here, it used to be, this how the industry would work. If you look at Beyonce and Alicia Keys, they were chosen at a time. And then they were developed. Dance lessons, and singing lessons. It was a time, like I remember, Clive Davis introducing, here's my new protege, Alicia Keys. There's no funds for A&R like that.

And I thought that at one time. I thought one day Russell Simmons is going to knock on my door. Hey, I heard there was a rapper named Jasiri here. It doesn't work that way. So really, you have to build your own fame. Regardless of who you are. So now, at the point where you build your fan base, I don't think-- I remember when Wiz signed. At the time, I was kind of saying, why? You have your own fan base already. What do you need a label? Now he went to the stratosphere with "Black and Yellow," and so that was a good decision. But there was another rapper in Pittsburgh that decided to remain independent named Mac Miller, and he as an independent rap artist, had the number one album in the country as an independent rapper. He just recently signed, I think they said, a \$30 million deal with Warner Brothers.

And so building your own fan base and doing it yourself actually puts you in a much stronger economic financial position. Also, too, if you sign a deal today, the deal is what they call a 360 record deal. So the record industry decided they were making these rappers stars, and then the rappers were doing movies, and they were doing all those other things. So they decided, well we deserve a piece of that. So now, if you sign a 360 deal, if you go on tour, they get a piece of that. You in a movie, they get a piece of that. You do a commercial, they get a piece

of that. I'm not interested in making less money overall. And so now, the move is to do independently.

There's a rapper from Chicago named Chance the Rapper, just became the first independent rap artist to do *Saturday Night Live*. And it was like, when Chance blew up, I remember the people was like, oh, is he going to sign? He had a song with Justin Bieber. I'm like, if you can get a song with Justin Bieber as independent artist, what do you need a record level for? At that point, it's just overhead. So I feel like rappers are making-- we're becoming more businessmen. And I feel like the independence of it is why you see the topics opening up. You see rappers talk about all these different topics. And I feel like because of the independent nature of hip hop right now, you could move that way. So I would definitely encourage you all to do it.

And then I always encourage rap artist to do something else besides rap. If I had to rely on just performance, like putting an album out, doing a tour, and doing some performances to pay my rent, I wouldn't be able to do it. But I do other things. I do workshops. I do speaking engagements. I have the organization One Hood, where we have organization in our community. I'll write blogs. I do other things. And so I'm relevant beyond what song or album I put out, because of these other things I do. I'm involved in the struggles. I'm not just rapping about what's happening, but I'm involved on the ground as an activist.

I encourage people to do more things. But it begins with having some type of presence on social media. The one thing that I see, I feel like artists, OK, you made a great album. Now how are we going to hear it? And so if you don't access and utilize social media, then how are we going to find you? How are we going to discover you? And so that's kind of what not only we've been able to do, but also been able to have a ground game in Pittsburgh, where people know me. They know One Hood. They know our community organization. This was an event that we did in One Hood called One Hood day, where we brought the-- sometimes the question is, and this'll be the last thing I say. I'm getting that thing.

Sometimes the question is, OK, you do socially conscious music, but the audience sometimes isn't people in our community. And so what do you do? Well, we took the social conscious hip hop concert into the hood. Set the thing up right on a basketball court. Some of the homies in the hood came out. They came out, they said we want to perform. We'll pay you to perform. You don't got to pay us. It's your community, man. Take the stage.

We had just a dope event. That's me jumping right there to the left. You see me jumping up and down. That's a rapper named Tef Poe, another artist that came out of the Ferguson movement, but an incredible MC. If you don't know him, I would holler at him as well. And so that's the advice I would give. So thank you for your questions. Thank you for having me. I look forward to getting into some more music. It's going to be a little heavier tonight, but hopefully it'll be good. It's goin to be good, right?

STEVE NICATA: No doubt about it.

JASIRI X: All right, so thank y'all for having me. I'm Jasiri X.

STEVE NICATA: I'm Steve [? Nicata, ?] and I'm a member of the MLK celebration planning committee. And we're just so thrilled to have you here, Jasiri. What a great workshop. Would you agree? It was so engaging, so interesting. Yeah, let's give it up one more time.

JASIRI X: And thank you for your questions. I mean, I appreciated the dialogue. And then I'm here. I have cards. I have CDs if you want to maybe grab some now, if you can't make it later on tonight, come holler at me.

STEVE NICATA: Definitely. And I advise you to come on time, if not early. We expect a big crowd tonight, so if you want to get a good seat, get there on time. Bring your friends, as well. And thank you for coming. We really appreciate it. If you'd like to grab a cookie or some food on your way out, please do. There's a lot there. And we'll see you tonight Thank you.