

NORTHSIDE VOICES

CROSSING FENCES
CONNECTING AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN AND BOYS
THROUGH THE ORAL TRADITION

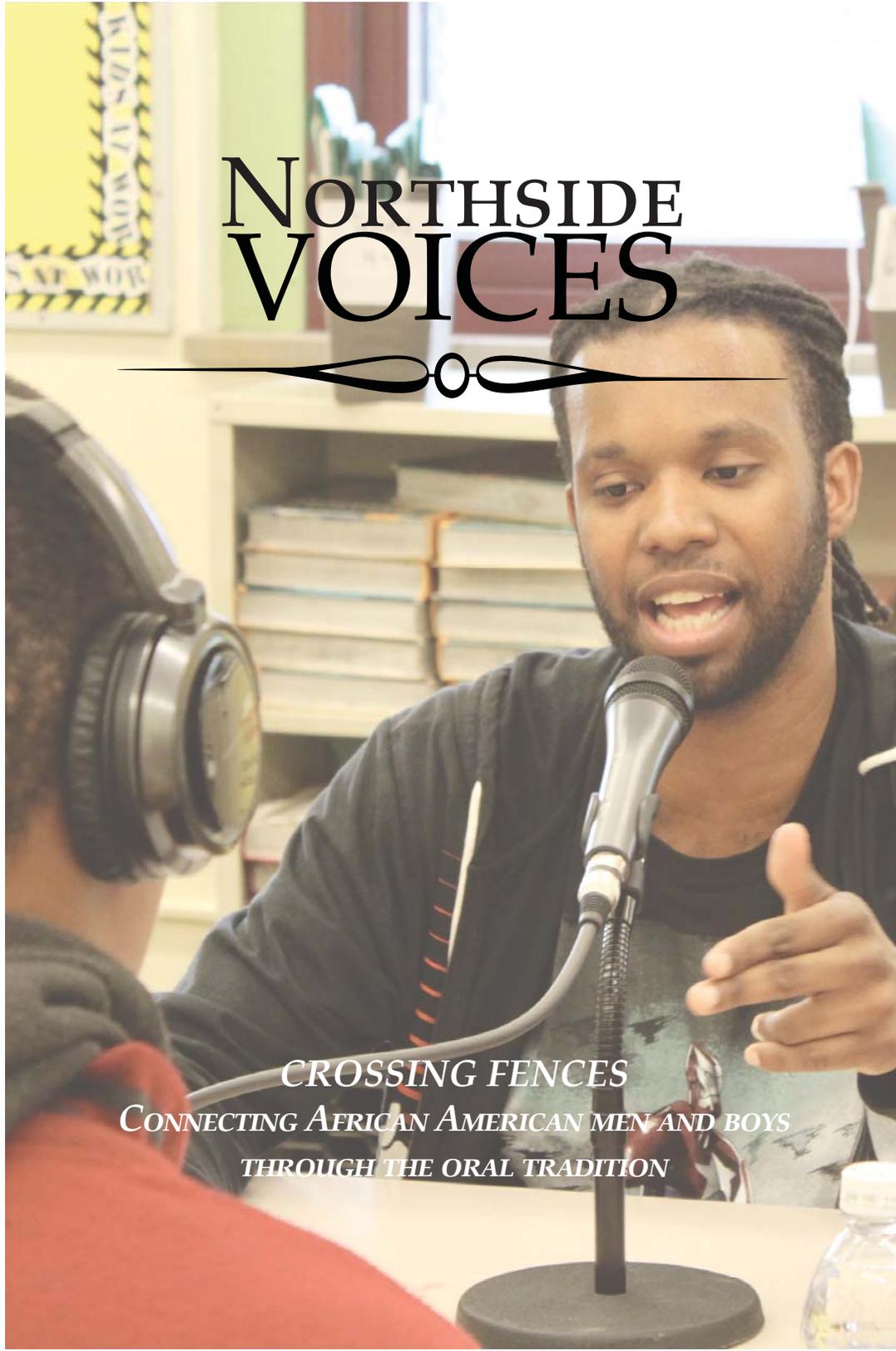


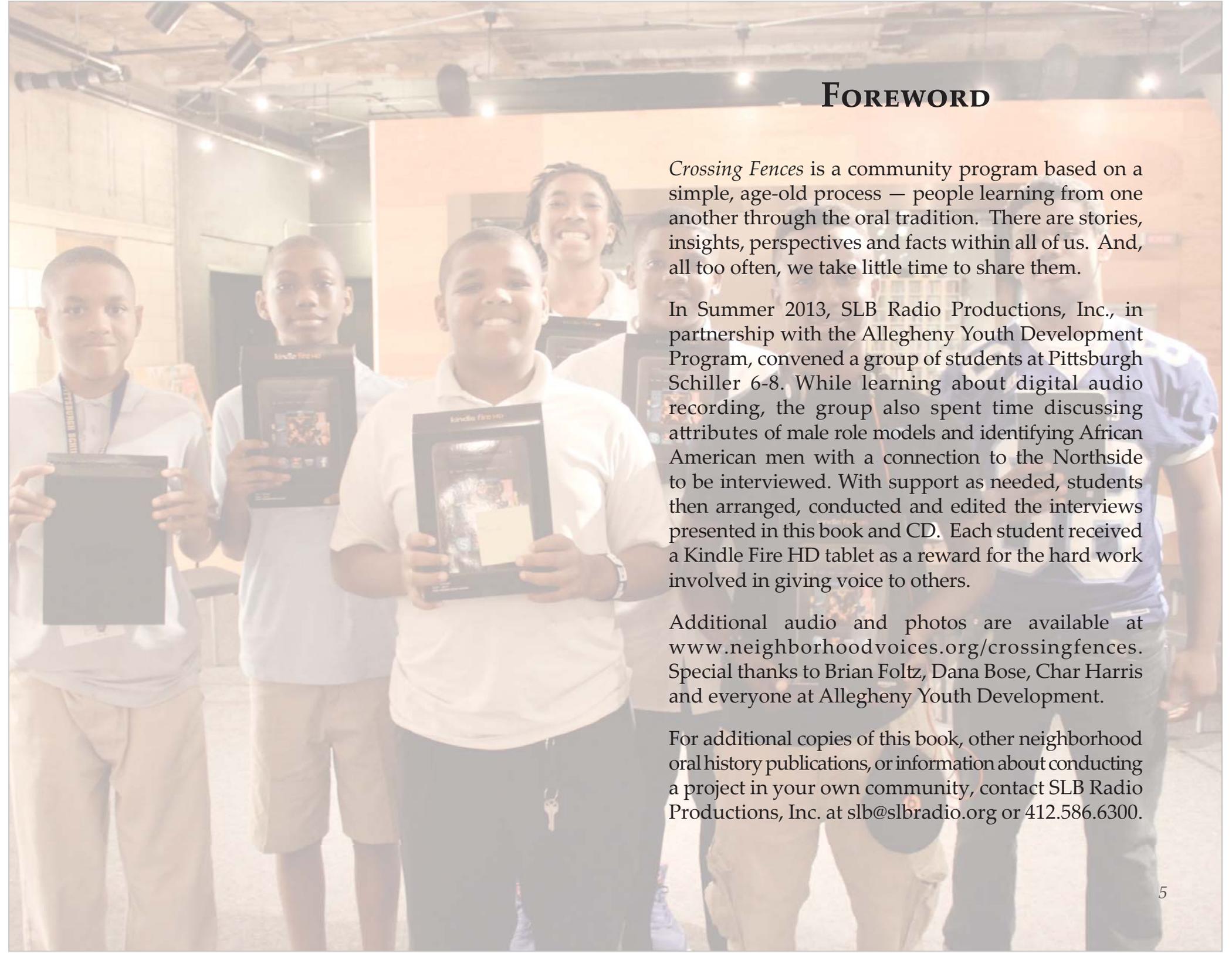
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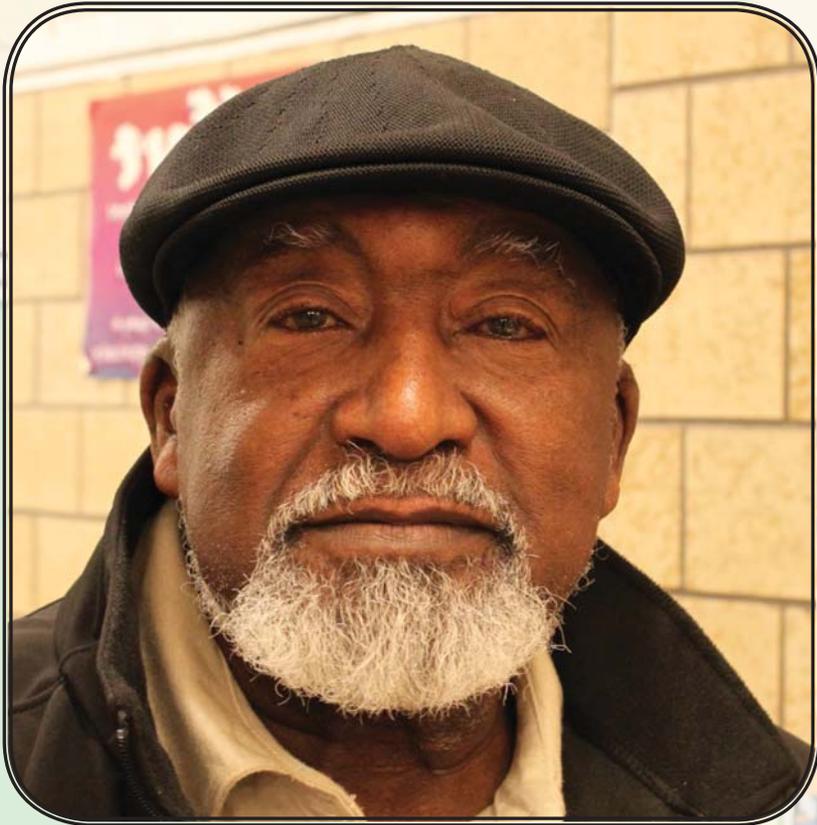
FOREWORD

Crossing Fences is a community program based on a simple, age-old process — people learning from one another through the oral tradition. There are stories, insights, perspectives and facts within all of us. And, all too often, we take little time to share them.

In Summer 2013, SLB Radio Productions, Inc., in partnership with the Allegheny Youth Development Program, convened a group of students at Pittsburgh Schiller 6-8. While learning about digital audio recording, the group also spent time discussing attributes of male role models and identifying African American men with a connection to the Northside to be interviewed. With support as needed, students then arranged, conducted and edited the interviews presented in this book and CD. Each student received a Kindle Fire HD tablet as a reward for the hard work involved in giving voice to others.

Additional audio and photos are available at www.neighborhoodvoices.org/crossingfences. Special thanks to Brian Foltz, Dana Bose, Char Harris and everyone at Allegheny Youth Development.

For additional copies of this book, other neighborhood oral history publications, or information about conducting a project in your own community, contact SLB Radio Productions, Inc. at slb@slbradio.org or 412.586.6300.



THADDEUS MOSLEY

Born 1926 - Sculptor

Interview by Martay Howard & Wyatt Wade

Excerpts from Track 1

When I was in middle school, I decided I wanted to go to college. So I really began to pull up my grades. Going to the University of Pittsburgh, I was right next door to the Carnegie Museum. [I] became interested in all types of modern art.

Sculpting was something I felt I could do. I wanted to do something with my hands and my brain. I

wanted to see if I could do some of the things I thought I could do. I read books and I went to the museum. The more I read and the more I worked, the better I became.

I never thought that I'd become as well known as I am now, that was not the intent. As I got better at it, I became a professional. To me, success means having pride in yourself. It doesn't mean you have a lot of money, a big house, and two or three cars. Being content with who you are and what you're able to do and living a good life, that to me is my success.

Have confidence in yourself. Believe that you can do it. Be proud of who you are. Take care of your brain, take care of your body. Those things are very important. I've always taken very good care of myself, been very proud, and had a lot of confidence. When you're young, there's a great deal of peer pressure, everyone wants you to be just like them. No one's like anyone else. It's tough being an individual, but don't be afraid to be an individual.

I learned that if you set your mind to it, you can be whatever you want to be when you grow up. Don't take no as an answer.

- Martay Howard, age 15



JOE KENNEDY IV

Born 1968 - Founder & CEO, Riverbends

Interview by Donnell Trowell & Tavon Ogletree

Excerpts from Track 2

I was one of the few and sometimes the only black kid in my class at a predominantly white, upper-middle class private school. That was difficult, but it also equipped me to work with people of all different kinds of backgrounds, and I think I came out stronger as a result.

I planned to study medicine when I went to college, but in college, I decided that I wanted to go into politics.

So I changed my major to political science and prepared for an education in law. I got into a very good law school and went there. My idea was to return to Pittsburgh, practice law for a few years, and then run for political office.

After a few years of practicing law, I realized that what was really making me happy was the non-profit work that I was doing. Ultimately, that is what propelled me to form my own non-profit company to help people research their family history and record what they find.

I think we, as a species, would do well to remember and reflect on the fact that we are all related, and I think when we do that, we'll do a better job of treating each other well.

The biggest struggle I have had to overcome is people's negative expectations [of] African American males. That has not stopped me and should not stop anyone else. No matter what other people's expectations are, you can succeed.

***I learned that you need to be focused
and work hard.***

- Donnell Trowell, age 13



MICHAEL THURMOND

Born 1961 - Master Plumber, Building Maintainer for Port Authority

Interview by DaSean Banks & Seric Frazier

Excerpts from Track 3

I actually loved living on the Northside. I had a very, very good life — sports, good people, positive environments, positive role models. I grew up in Northview Heights. It was a lot of families, a strong community of families, recurring generations, so you knew everybody.

In the '70s, Northview Heights [had] a state of the art school. They had a lot of new equipment. A lot of the

teachers were smart, young, dynamic. They were innovative, they were in tune with the students. They took a lot of time with you to make sure you learned. They were positive role models.

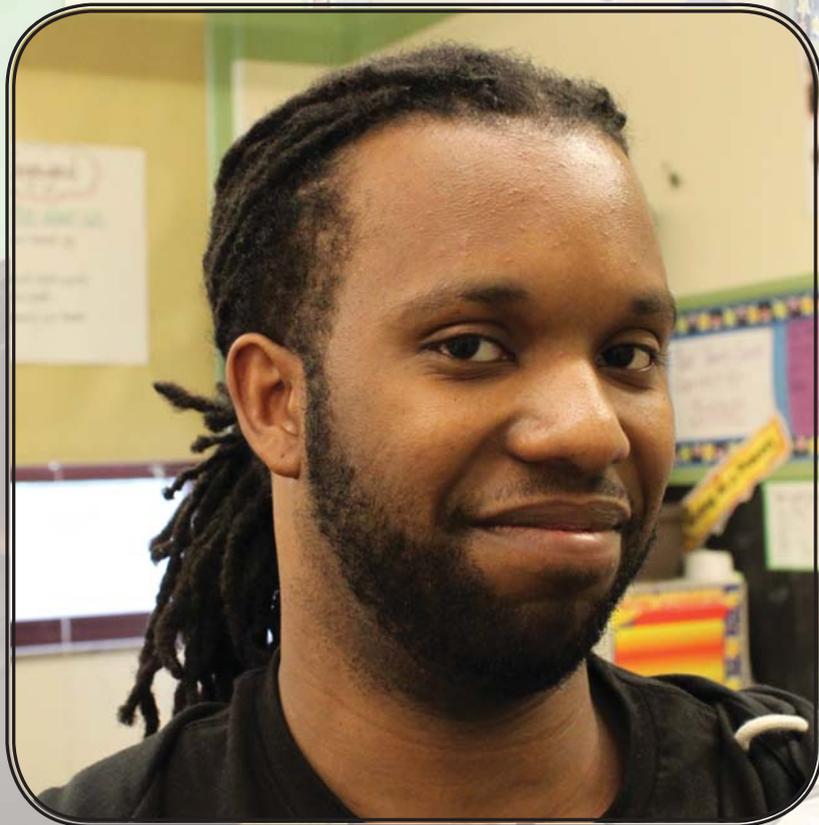
What we didn't have materially, we had on decency, morality, honesty, respectability, all those important things that make a person a good person. I thank my mother for that...because my dad died when I was eleven. She raised us by herself. Her life was pretty much bible-based, which gave us that structure to be decent people. My dad, he told us when we were younger, he said, "Never start something that you're not gonna finish. If you start it, finish it."

My nickname in school was The Professor. People made fun of me, but I didn't let that stop me. Education was the ticket to success. Once you receive the knowledge, it can never be taken away from you. The knowledge is priceless, it is the building block for anywhere you want to go.

Remember that you are somebody. That's with or without money, with or without fame, with or without prestige. You as a person, you are somebody. Build on that.

He inspired me to start making friends with more people and getting to know more people, instead of pushing people away.

- DaSean Banks, age 13



DEACON CHARLES GRAYSON III

Born 1982 - Community Motivator

Interview by Donnell Trowell & James Perry

Excerpts from Track 4

I was raised in Manchester and about ten when all the gangbanging and whatnot started. My elementary school, part of my middle school, was seeing a lot of things I shouldn't have seen. I was shot in the leg during a drive-by. It was just a lot of injuries and physical harm and danger that I had to overcome in my youth.

Both my kids go to school in Manchester. It's changed a little bit, but not enough to my liking. So, I'm gonna be part of that change. Instead of just sitting back and complaining, I'm gonna get my hands dirty.

You learn a lot from your environment, so I can never say I regret where I came from. Struggle builds character. A lot of people that don't go through a lot of things, when struggles do come, they have problems persevering.

What I want to do is help the young men in the community understand that they can be more than what the media and people portray them to be. The easiest way to do that is to be the example. I can be that example.

I started rapping when I was about 14. I had a few chances, did a few shows, and they didn't work out. I was rapping about the wrong things. About five or six years ago, I really started getting into my walk with God. That's when I changed my material from less about street life and more about Christ.

Be as creative as you can. You always want to separate yourself. You want to make sure you are different so that way you stick out and people will see you.

He is a good person that gives back to the community and he loves God in every way.

- Donnell Trowell, age 13



DANA BOSE

Born 1970 - Director, Allegheny Youth Development

Interview by DaSean Banks & Kalil Reeves

Excerpts from Track 5

Not seeing my mother a lot was a struggle. She had to work to support us, so she was gone a lot. I would be home most of the time by myself. With my mother working as much as she did, there really wasn't a push for me to achieve academically. As long as I wasn't failing, it was okay.

My trouble with the law started, believe it or not, on a Martin Luther King day. I wasn't thinking clearly, that's for sure. It wasn't for a lack of love or attention. I felt like I was old enough to make my own decisions and I was making the wrong decisions.

I decided that being locked up was not the way that I wanted to live my life. Once you get a record, it's hard for you to obtain a job. Thanks to God, I was able to get a passport and I was able to serve my country. It definitely opened up my eyes to life, to freedom. We have so many people that fought for us to be free. Then we turn around and do things [to give our rights] right back, and then we're locked up again.

One of the reasons I love my job is that I get to share things so that young men don't go the path that I went. Looking back on my life, I believe that everything happened for a reason, so that there's really nothing that I would want to go back and change. I believe that God designed me to go through what I went through for a purpose.

Mr. B inspired me to start doing good in school. So now, I'm trying to go to college and do whatever else I want to do.

- DaSean Banks, age 13



LUQMON ABDUS'SALAAM

Born 1969 - Poet, Performer, Entrepreneur

Interview by Louie Rice, Deondre Morgan & Sonnie Watts

Excerpts from Track 6

I was labeled an underachiever. Looking back, if I applied myself I'd have been a high, straight-A student. I'd be a lot further along. I wanted to be an artist, so I just struck out on the path to be an artist and haven't stopped since.

I help young people every day, starting with my children. I think adults, a lot of times, don't learn

He likes to be different and he expresses his feelings using poetry.

- Deondre Morgan, age 14

He taught me how to be a leader instead of being a follower and to think for yourself instead of letting the group think for you.

- Louie Rice, age 14

from young people. I'm always studying young people...so I can apply whatever I feel I can apply. Even if it's just being a mentor [that's] a cool cat.

Even now I still have mentors. Grab onto a mentor, a good mentor, that gives you another outlook, that makes you say, "I didn't think about that."

Find what you love to do. Become a master at it. Once you become a master at that, you've got to find a way to make money from it. It takes 10,000 hours of practice to become a master at something. You become a master at it, everybody will always be looking to you for that thing.



ERNEST DORSETT, SR.

Born 1975 - Gospel DJ

Interview by Justin McEachern, Terrance McIntosh & Deondre Morgan

Excerpts from Track 7

I planned my future in high school. The only thing I had to look up to coming up were the dudes down at WAMO who were DJing — something that I wanted to do - or the cats on the corner making that money. I chose to DJ instead of sell drugs.

Any type of music has a message, whether the message is good or whether the message is bad.

When you listen to music, you're listening to what someone else feels. A lot of the music that's out now, I can't listen to because what they're saying is not going to help you in life if you're trying to be successful. I just don't feed myself with that.

There's a lot of knowledge in books. We won't pick up a book and read, but we'll grab the remote control for the PlayStation and learn how to play the game in a week. But we'll be in class all year and can't even pass it! It all depends on where your heart is at. What do you want to achieve out of life?

People make mistakes. No one is perfect. But if there's something that you want to do, you strive to keep on doing it. Don't let anybody tell you that you can't. You can be anything you want to be, but you have to have an education.

He listens to music that is a good influence and inspires us to stay positive.

- Justin McEachern, age 13

He is a DJ for churches and plays music that had something to do with God. I thought that was pretty cool.

- Terrance McIntosh, age 12

There was a lot of violence in the community that he was in, so he tried to go to different places that were safe.

- Deondre Morgan, age 14



QUINCY KOFI SWATSON

Born 1991 - Youth Mentoring Advocate

Interview by Eric Worlds & Justin McEachern

Excerpts from Track 8

School was not easy for me. There are these people that try to influence you in a negative way, but it's your own personal will that will persevere to positive things. Some people really motivated me to keep going. These people helped me understand what I was learning, helped me understand how it will be helpful in the future, and just pulled me in the right direction.

Mr. Swatson works with youth on the Northside. I think this is important because some people don't have male figures in their lives.

- Eric Worlds, age 14

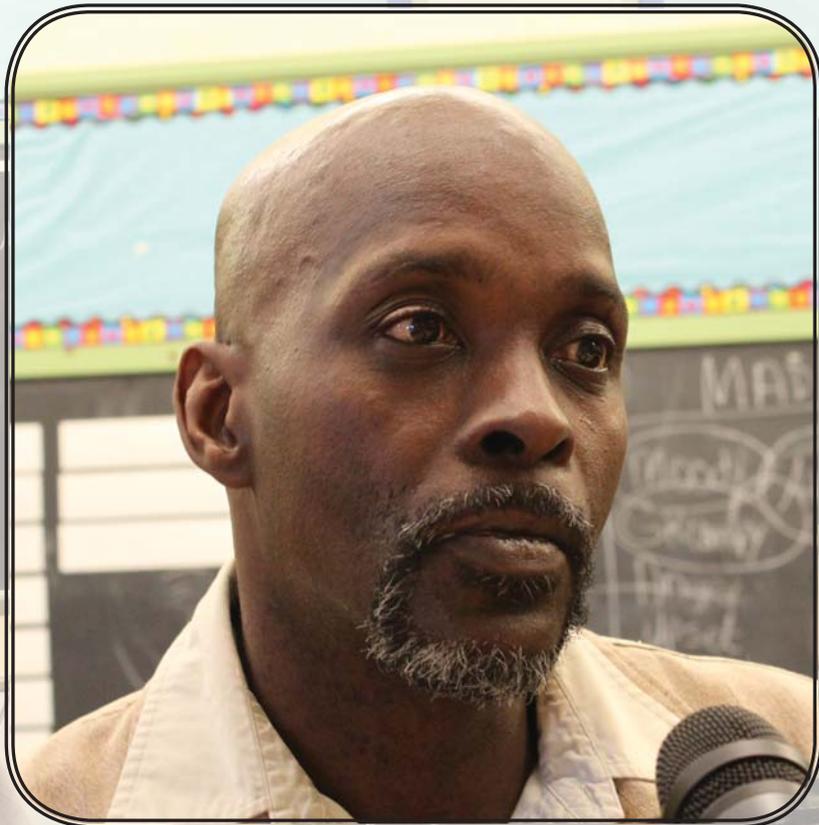
He's a demonstration of how good you can become if you succeed.

- Justin McEachern, age 13

My mom wanted to be there to see one of her kids graduate from college. When I was a kid, there were so many things that I wanted to be when I grew up. When I decided that I could be most effective by helping my community, I decided to go into non-profit work.

Being born and raised on the Northside, I feel invested in the Northside and really connected to where I live. I want to actively make it better, make sure there were activities for the kids to do and enough mentors to mentor the youth.

My secret to success is ambition and motivation, and surrounding myself with positive people. I think that is key to getting to where you want to be. Surround yourself with people who want to see you succeed.



JAMES ROBERT HERRING III

Born 1961 - Outreach Director, NeighborHope

Interview by Deondre Morgan & Terrance McIntosh

Excerpts from Track 9

When you're young, some choices are long-lasting and life-changing. You can do some things as a young man that will affect you and follow you for the rest of your life. I wish that I was able to play a video [where] the streets would just show you all the people that they've chewed up. It would amaze you, the talent that's all around you, but by making bad decisions, they're just wasted lives.

Mr. James Herring is a good role model because he teaches other kids to do right.

- Deondre Morgan, age 14

He was from Manchester, and he did something positive with his life.

- Terrance McIntosh, age 12

When I was real young, I wanted to be a singer. I never really imagined myself doing what I'm doing now. But God is so good. The mistakes that I made when I was younger allow me to minister to young men. Now, when I speak to young men, I don't speak from an opinion. I tell them this is what I went through and this is what you get when you do this.

I realize now that a lot of the things that we have, and even opportunities that you guys have, is because you stand on the shoulders of the people that came before you. A lot of times I took things for granted, but now that I've gotten older, I realize that people made a lot of sacrifices for us to have the opportunities that we have now.



EUGENE THOMAS, JR.

Born 1956 - CEO, Quik-It Chicken

*Interview by Martay Howard, Tyreek Henderson & Justin McEachern
Excerpts from Track 10*

My dad was a good role model. I didn't really lean too much towards sports players. They're not really people you can reach out and touch and talk to. Older individuals in the community, they motivate you. I would sit and talk to them. I would listen to them. They would tell me what to do, what not to do.

He told us that if you set your mind to something, and if your friends want to do other stuff, you don't have to be just like them. You can be a unique person and do your own thing.

- Martay Howard, age 15

He inspires you to always keep your mind working so you're always concentrating on things that give you new ideas.

- Justin McEachern, age 13

I learned how life is going to be hard work, and how I can get through it.

- Tyreek Henderson, age 13

I always had my own ideas and goals. Just to want to be something was more important for me as a kid. I always wanted to be known for something.

I always persevered — no matter what obstacles I was faced with — to achieve the goals that I wanted. Sometimes it takes a lot longer than I had planned, but I still persevere. Whatever your goals and dreams are, pursue them and keep them alive. Make them become a part of you. Don't take no for an answer.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The opinions expressed herein are solely those of the individuals represented and do not necessarily reflect those of The Heinz Endowments, Allegheny Youth Development, or any other collaborating organization.

TRACK LISTING

1. THADDEUS MOSLEY
2. JOE KENNEDY IV
3. MICHAEL THURMOND
4. DEACON CHARLES GRAYSON III
5. DANA BOSE
6. LUQMON ABDUS'SALAAM
7. ERNEST DORSETT, SR.
8. QUINCY KOFI SWATSON
9. JAMES ROBERT HERRING III
10. EUGENE THOMAS, JR.

YOUTH REFLECTIONS APPEAR ON TRACKS 11-20.

