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An Artist with a Cause
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bKrWH6ShB6E>

Part I: Haiku: “Stage of Life”

Watch performances

Give life to the unrealized

On the stage of life

Part II: Essay: An Artist with a Cause

I have a heart for politically empowering black youth and seek to use my intellectual capacities and creative talents to accomplish this. Consequently, my research interests and career goals center on the following mission: empowering black youth through the arts. This essay explores the formation of my intellectual identity and who I want to be in this world.

First, black people’s struggle for freedom is a major source of motivation in my life. When I reflect on figures such as Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglas, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Bob Moses, I am amazed by their courage and social impact. Joyce West Stevens (2002) states role models play a pivotal role in shaping the identity of adolescents. I can personally attest to that. As Clayborne Carson (1991) and Eric Burner (1994) document, these bold black people struggled against slavery, segregation, and political disenfranchisement. Their example encouraged me to seek solutions to problems facing the black community.

As I carried this desire to solve complex problems, I, even when it was unconscious, gravitated toward certain coursework and pursuits throughout college. My research interests

include Hip-hop culture, political theory, and black political participation. My interests in political ideas and Hip-hop moved me to apply to the McNair Scholars Program. My research mentor, Dr. Michelle Smith helped me believe in studying the intersection between Hip-hop and politics. Undergraduate research eventually led me to the University of Chicago where I had the privilege of researching under Dr. Michael Dawson and Dr. Cathy Cohen. From Dr. Dawson's *Black Visions* (2003), I observed how to marry political theory and empirical research while exploring black political participation. From Dr. Cohen's *Democracy Remixed* (2007), I learned about the political alienation of black youth, which has become one of my central academic focuses. Drs. Smith, Dawson, and Cohen profoundly impacted my intellectual interests.

After exploring the intellectual currents of black political participation as a scholar, I now seek to empower black youth through acting and rapping professionally. Reflecting on my personal life, I can recall instances of creative performances that both entertained and educated me. Denzel Washington, for example, through his role in *The Great Debaters* (2007), exposed me to Melvin Tolson, a poet, educator, and politician (Joseph, 2008). Another artist, a rapper by the name of Jay Electronica (2009), introduced me to Kurt Vonnegut, an American literary great who often dealt with social and political issues (Reed, 1999). As a professional artist, I want to use rap and acting to lead my audience into new territory, whether that terrain is self-discovery, an inspiring figure, or the cause of getting black youth more involved in politics.

Part III: Spoken Word: "Lights, Camera, Action"

Take stark realities out of the dark

With words and actions expressed through the arts

Use the spotlight and show them, your audience a poem

Or skit, to flip the switch
Cause we youth ain't "on", lyrically speaking
So I preach speaking politically while performing publicly,
Cause news dodges the happenings
Like lives lost in the hood, or black children missing,
So I'm thinking the movement won't be televised, (Scott-Heron)
But it quickens as discontent hits,
Making comfort and slumber, temper and trouble,
But it won't happen til words are spoken
It won't happen til words are spoken
It won't happen til words are spoken
Action!

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