


Spring 5-19-2016

# My Neighborhood Is Changing: Positive Youth Development in the Historic Near East Side

Fevean N. Keflom

SIT Graduate Institute, fevean.keflom@mail.sit.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/capstones>

 Part of the [African American Studies Commons](#), [Art Education Commons](#), [Art Practice Commons](#), [Creative Writing Commons](#), [Educational Psychology Commons](#), [Political History Commons](#), [Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education Commons](#), and the [Social History Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Keflom, Fevean N., "My Neighborhood Is Changing: Positive Youth Development in the Historic Near East Side" (2016). *Capstone Collection*. Paper 2872.

This Thesis (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by the SIT Graduate Institute at SIT Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Capstone Collection by an authorized administrator of SIT Digital Collections. For more information, please contact [digitalcollections@sit.edu](mailto:digitalcollections@sit.edu).

My Neighborhood is Changing:

Positive Youth Development in the Historic Near East Side

Fevean Keflom

PIM 74

A capstone paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master

of Arts in Intercultural Service, Leadership and Management

at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, VT, USA

May 16, 2016

Advisor: John Ungerleider

CLC Youth Program Leadership and Design

### **Consent to Use of Capstone**

Consent to Use of Capstone I hereby grant permission for World Learning to publish my capstone on its websites and in any of its digital/ electronic collections, and to reproduce and transmit my CAPSTONE ELECTRONICALLY. I understand that World Learning's websites and digital collections are publicly available via the Internet. I agree that World Learning is NOT responsible for any unauthorized use of my capstone by any third party who might access it on the Internet or otherwise.

Student name: Fevean Keflom

Date: May, 16, 2016

### **Dedication/Acknowledgements**

I first would like to begin by thanking the God I serve ( Temesgen Amlak), I am humbled and beyond blessed to reach this monumental point in my journey. I would also like to thank the two most important people in life, my Mother/Adey Netsanet Ketema and my Father/Aboy Nerayo Keflom. My lifelines, my teachers and my number one motivators—you risked your life, left your home and everything you had to give me the world, I will never let you down. In addition to my loving parents, I want to send my gratitude to my siblings Dahab, Mars, Marta and Robell. I am thankful to come from such a loving family and proud of the work we collectively have accomplished. I would be remised if I did not express my gratitude for all the educators who have supported me in all my academic and career endeavors, more importantly my professors at SIT and my Alma Mater at the University of Cincinnati, I only wish to repay you all by supporting the next generation. To my former students graduating from Linden McKinley STEM Academy in Columbus, Ohio, this degree is for you...thank you for helping me find my true passion for youth leadership and empowerment. To my friends and extended family members who never gave up on me, I hope that I continue to make you all proud. To my colleagues at SIT, thank you for your stories, the laughs, the tears but more importantly your love—especially my SIT Family (you know who you are). Only God knows what we endured. Finally this paper is dedicated to Black youth all across the diaspora, I only hope to continue to advocate for your right to exist and dream in this world. Last but not least, I dedicate this paper to my beloved motherland, Eritrea, Africa. I am nothing without my Eritrean identity, Glory to our Martyrs and Happy 25<sup>th</sup> Independence----*Zelalemawi Zikri Ni'Sewat'na --- Awet N' Hafash!*

**Table of Contents**

Consent to Use Capstone.....2

Dedications/Acknowledgements.....3

Table of Contents.....4

Abstract.....5

Introduction.....6

Literature Review.....9

Practitioner Inquiry Design.....15

Presentation & Data Analysis.....32

Discussions.....41

References.....48

**Abstract**

In this paper, I consider the impact of positive youth development in the lives of Black youth, in the Historic Near East Side of Columbus, OH. More specifically, I examine initiatives centered in cultural arts, holistic support, and African centered education in order to identify positive trends impacting urban Black youth. My research is guided by the question: How are Black youth impacted by urban development in a historic African-American neighborhood?

The Near East Side(NES) is a distinguished neighborhood, and in the past laid the foundation for some of the most prominent and successful African American owned businesses in Columbus, Ohio. In the present, it still holds onto its historical and cultural significance, it is home to one of oldest National Urban League affiliates and continues to host multicultural and renowned artists from all over the world at the Lincoln Theater. Similar to other historic African American neighborhoods across the country, the Near East Side was subjected to both racial and social exclusion in order to promote urban renewal projects, which played a large role in the destruction of the community (Columbus Urban League).

This research aims to provide examples of theories and practices grounded in cultural and historical preservation pedagogy by linking them to positive youth development trends impacting Black youth. The literature review is comprised of case studies, annual reports, community observations and an in-depth interview, as well as my personal experience working and serving as both a Program Coordinator at the Columbus Urban League and a community organizer.

## **Introduction**

Growing up in Columbus, Ohio as the daughter of two Eritrean refugees shaped my reality and provided me with a sincere indebtedness for cultural appreciation at a very young age. Each and every Saturday, I attended Tigrinya language school taught by my father and other members of our small but robust Eritrean community. Throughout the years, I participated in annual Independence Day dances and tributes, performed the Eritrean National Anthem and Tigrinya language school (native tongue). For thirty years, the nation of Eritrea fought for independence in one of the longest battles dated in Africa (Pool, 1982). Despite the constant state of terror my family and those alike had to endure, the people of Eritrea created a revolutionary platform that would empower generations to come, thus creating strong communities all across the diaspora.

When I think about “Positive Youth Development” and “Youth Empowerment”, I reflect on my upbringing through a Tigrinya word, *Hidri*. The word *Hidri*, which roughly translates to “Our legacy”, became heavily popularized during the armed struggle. *Hidri* is often used when describing the role youth play in upholding the legacy of Eritrean sovereignty through a liberation framework. As I navigate my way through adulthood, I still remain fixated on this theme of *Hidri*, the promotion of preservation of one’s national and cultural identity by honoring the past in order to be successful in the future, through my involved with serving Black youth.

Currently, I serve as a Program Coordinator at the Columbus Urban League, one of the oldest affiliates of the National Urban League dating back to 1918 (cul.org). The past two summers I have worked in the Education and Youth Services Department and since then have become heavily invested in our mantra, “empowering communities, changing lives”. Not only has this redefined the way I engage and serve my community, but it has also led to me process the relevance of cultural preservation and its positive impact on our youth, *Hidri* of Columbus.

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

To begin this paper, I will first lay the foundation by reflecting on the history and pattern of African American migration and its relationship to Columbus, Ohio. I will then share some historical and cultural elements of the Near East Side Columbus. The majority of my paper will be focused in my literature review. I will expound on three topics: Afrocentric Education, Cultural Art and Holistic Support. Within that, I will weave in parts of the Near East Side history and why these topics are specifically important and relevant for positive youth development to take place. I will conclude by sharing some of my findings from an interview and concluding with some recommendations. My recommendations pull from current trends impacting Black youth in Columbus, as well as other historic Black neighborhoods.

The early 1900's in the United States proved to not only be a time of expressive and cultural conscience for Black Americans, but also a time of trail blazing leadership, organization and deepened sense of community. In every major city in The United States, you can find a historic Black neighborhood or settlement (Harlem Renaissance, 2009). At the time, Jim Crow Laws enacted racial codes, which challenged both African Americans' mobility within city lines and their physical safety, and thereby influencing the creation of segregated communities (Slavery in America, 2009). As a result, the collectiveness that took place in Black communities became essential as a means of survival, acknowledged by Black youth and adults alike. This concept of community paired with Black economic success impacted the youth in such a way that many eventually evolved into some of the most dignified leaders during the civil rights movement (Mushi, 2011, p.2). Many of these same leaders continue to be a part of the current wave of efforts to bring justice and equity to the lives of disenfranchised groups of people

In 2016, many historic Black neighborhoods and settlements find themselves barely standing the test of times. Neighborhoods that once exemplified Black excellence and triumph



## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

have become areas of destitution plagued with intergenerational trauma, drugs, and violence, leaving only but a few symbols for hope—Martin Luther King Blvd signage and the youth. Having recognized the importance of youth leadership in struggles for civil rights and freedom, and with my continued involvement in the Near East Side community, I began to ask the questions: How do you empower Black youth to take back their communities, to live out the meaning of *Hidri* and take part in their own liberation? What tools can be suggested and how can we make these resources attainable to serve all and not some youth? Such questions nurtured my curiosity and directed the type of research I wanted to conduct, and further supporting my passion for positive youth development as it relates to Black youth.

### **Statement of Research**

Presently, the Near East Side (NES) of Columbus, Ohio is an area of high interest for city development, given its position as centrally located and in close proximity to downtown's Short North district, another recently developed area that caters to young, upwardly mobile professionals. Over the past two years, I have become intrigued by these current developments and their impact on the Near East Side's residents. The richness and collective nature born in African American communities across the nation generated decades of accomplishments, and more importantly everlasting memories for its youth who took part in the vision. The question I will pose is for this research is: How are Black youth in the Near East Side impacted by urban development?

My research is two-fold and will allow me to expound on the question from multiple angles. I will begin by examining this question from a local perspective, intentionally researching the history of The NES and its impact on Black families' overtime. From there, I will delve into my examinations of positive youth development trends both locally and nationally in

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

historic African American neighborhoods and communities. I would like my research to celebrate the importance of urban youth development, as well as identify prospects for success based upon observations of other African American communities.

My examinations while working at the Columbus Urban League and awareness of some of the current development underway in The NES, paired with my interest in youth development, has led me to survey trends by highlighting three themes: Cultural Arts, African Centered Education, and Holistic Support/Intervention. I consider the aforementioned themes pillars of positive youth development as it relates to Black youth empowerment.

### **Literature Review**

#### **African Americans and The Great Migration**

Frederick Douglas once said “America is false to the past, false to the present, and solemnly binds herself to be false to the future” (Douglass, 1952). As harsh as these words may read, they echo the frustration and grim reality raised in many Black communities across our nation. This country, the land of “milk and honey,” was not only built upon the backs of African slaves, but upon the belief that “All men were created equally”, this is a juxtaposition at best, and yet this is remains the unpopular narrative of the American people. In 1866 the 13th Amendment was introduced, which ratified the abolishment of slavery. Although created with capitalist intent, it marked the beginning of civil rights litigation. Failure on behalf of the Reconstruction Era coupled with the rise of Jim Crow, which embraced a racial caste system, created room for white supremacy to rein and stifle progression for many disenfranchised groups (Slavery in America, 2009). Despite the distressing conditions, many African Americans in the 1900’s began to embark on a new journey, one that would lay the foundation for Black communities to come.

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

During the Great Migration, many African Americans relocated to the North and Midwest, in hoping to escape the atrocities endured in the Deep South. In parts of the country like New York, Black men and women reinvented themselves through the Harlem Renaissance and other forms of Black conscious engagement, which often transitioned moments in history into social movements. The Harlem Renaissance exposed the variety of Black Diaspora philosophy and art forms. This integration of the “New Negro” was not only customary for Harlem residents, but became prevalent as African American’s migrated West in search of opportunity. The Midwest, including states like Ohio played a major role in the development of historic Black neighborhoods during the Great Migration (Harlem Renaissance, 2009).

### **African American Prominence in Columbus**

Although Columbus, Ohio is not often celebrated nationally as a beacon of African American culture, historic efforts made by African American’s in Columbus date back to the early 1800’s, prior to the ratification of 13th amendment. According to the Columbus Landmarks Foundation, it was believed that, “The census of 1810 probably did not record all African Americans in Franklin County. Fear of defending one’s legal status or undocumented status may have accounted for 43 “free colored” persons. In 1820 there were 132 free people of color and in 1830 there were 288” (p.13). By the late 1800’s, that number had grown exponentially. Interestingly enough, African Americans in Columbus dispersed themselves among the eight wards, which contrasted racial migration patterns of African Americans in Ohio’s major city Cleveland, which remained confined to fewer wards.

The Near East Side, which was comprised of many historic African American settlements and communities, at one point documented that “About 650 blacks or 35% of Columbus’s total black population, c. 1870, lived along East Long Street and East Spring Street”

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

(Columbus Landmarks, p.16). Over time the population grew and came to be the largest African American settlement in the city. What we know today as the Near East Side attracted many African Americans for various reasons. For example, those coming from the South who were displaced by the Civil War saw potential because of its close proximity to industrialized work in the city on railways. Though The Near East Side is significant mainly because of contributions of African Americans, at the time there were other racial and ethnic groups' present, working, living and building communities.

While racial codes were enforced heavily in the city of Columbus, similar to communities across the nation, the Near East Side presented itself as a place of blended histories. In a report written by Columbus Landmarks Association, African American Settlements & Communities in Columbus, Ohio, one resident depicted their time growing up in the NES with the following testimony:

The Avenue was that great...everybody was looking to open a business.

They wanted to own a shop on the Avenue...Mt. Vernon was a mixed area at the time.

It wasn't all black. It had Italians, blacks, Jewish people living in the area, as well as, working in the area. And all owned property, from the railroad tracks on the north to Broad Street on the south, Taylor Avenue on the east and Hamilton Avenue on the west.

It was like a pocket in itself, and it was a business area in itself. And everyone worked together, hand in hand...You didn't have to go anywhere else to buy anything. (p.17)

### **Near East Side Identity: Making of Bronzeville**

The statement above, even as a reader, can provoke a state of nostalgia. One of the city's richest cultural settlements, Bronzeville, located in The NES constantly brings back

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

memories for its former residents. What is important to note is how the name Bronzeville came to Columbus. As previously mentioned the Great Migration led many African Americans to the Midwest. One city in particular that played a major role in African American settlement was Chicago (Jax, 2009).

Bronzeville was a term coined in Chicago (Bean, 2016). For some time the area neighborhood was often called the Black Belt, this name was unpopular amongst the residents, thus coining the term Bronzeville. This term would ultimately pay homage to its residents by referencing their complexions, the variety of browns; *Bronzeville*. Over time, many African American communities nationally would adopt the term (Jax,2009). In 1938, the *Columbus Dispatch* wrote an article titled “Bronzeville Movement,” highlighting the newly appointed Mayor and a Cabinet of Bronzeville. Although these positions were not regarded by public government officials, it was the community of Bronzeville’s way to “keep the welfare of the race at heart” (Vitale, 2009), moreover showing their relentless pursuit to play an active role in developing their community, despite laws in place. Bronzeville was just one example of how historic Black communities across the nation embraced collectiveness in struggle and opportunity.

During the Great Migration, there was a large influx of poor African Americans from the South making their way into Columbus, who relied on this collectiveness. With little to their name, and lack of housing options these African American’s would create a village of their own, this would affectionately be remembered as the Blackberry Patch. The Blackberry Patch was made up of many shacks, scraps at best and described to be “devoid of sanitation and amenities” (Columbus Landmarks, p.32). Despite the conditions, it is often discussed as a place that boasted in harmony and community. In the midst of the Great Depression, a survey led by the Columbus

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

Urban League through the National Youth Administration Project accessed the housing conditions and declination of employment. The results presented that nearly  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the African Americans surveyed were unemployed, which yielded to the significant changes in development. Eventually, the Blackberry Patch was demolished in order to give the people more dignified housing, which would become what we know today as Pointdexter Village (Columbus Landmarks, p.34).

In 1940, the Pointdexter Village opened, providing low-income housing and updated amenities for its residents. Although many families were forced to seek refuge elsewhere, the spirit of the Blackberry Patch was in some ways reignited and “residents soon recovered many of the former cultural and social amenities that the Blackberry Patch had provided” (Columbus Landmarks, p.34). At the time the dedication of Pointdexter Village occurred, President Franklin D. Roosevelt was present. Not only was this the first housing project in Ohio, it also was notably the second in the United States. Aminah Robinson, a well-respected artist born and raised in Pointdexter Village best described it by stating in her children’s book, “the stories of its residents made Pointdexter Village a magical place full of traditions, legends, and history” (Columbus Landmarks, p. 35). Nearly 15 years later the World War II the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 was introduced as part of an “urban renewal” agenda. This enabled zoning classification and redlining to take place in the city, which severely impacted African American communities and business.

slum clearance with federal funds going to city coffers meant cities could redesign and redefine which communities lived or died, where political favors could be called in, and where there were inadequate resources for relocating those people who could not afford to move from the inner city. With slum clearance and federal

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

funds (and matching state monies) -- cheap land encouraged land grabbing and property values dropped. People were red-lined to specific neighborhoods by race and the politics of segregation led to government- assisted programs and limited housing choices. (Columbus Landmarks p.36)

Although many of the Near East Side residents appreciated the community that surrounded them, others began to leave the area in search of better opportunities once desegregation took place. Though there are various factors that play into the diminution of the Near East Side, sadly, this phenomenon was replicated in African American communities across the nation, and these communities have rarely been able to bounce back from the devastation.

Currently, the NES has been part of many redevelopment efforts, which began with while under the leadership of former Columbus Mayor Michael B. Coleman— the longest running African American mayor in our nation’s history (Sullivan, Caruso, 2014). Prior to Coleman leaving office, much attention had been focused on the revitalization of the King Lincoln District, leveraging restoration of historic monuments and buildings, as well as housing properties. More recently, the same highway, which included a bridge that divided the Near East Side from engaging with the city has been transformed into a cultural wall, covered with enlarged photographs of notable African Americans and organizations that contributed to the success of the area.

One can only imagine for those who witnessed the Near East Side during its prime, the pain and frustration that comes knowing that many of the youth today are unaware of the shoulders of giants they stand upon. Many of the residents who witnessed the Near East Side’s greatness as youth have become instrumental in implementing social and cultural change in Columbus, Ohio as well as preservation of their beloved neighborhood. However, what is the

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

purpose of preservation if the current youth in the community are not fully engaged both physically and mentally?

### **Practitioner Inquiry and Design**

#### **Positive Youth Development and Theory in Practice; Afrocentric Education, Art and Holistic Support**

According to the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs the definition for positive youth development is:

Positive youth development is an intentional, pro-social approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances youths' strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths (youth.gov)

One of the most significant aspects of development is the impact it has on one's sense of resiliency. When we as communities discuss strategies for positive youth development, we are investing in ways to better equip our youth with tools, which will allow them to become productive citizens as they mature. Youth Development is not only about the results overtime but acknowledging the intricate and sometimes subtle transitions through one's adolescence. Each stage is significant in developing their worldview. Adolescence is some of the most formative years of life, both psychically and mentally and its importance is often times overlooked. Eric Erickson, whose studies center around psychosocial development, outlines the different stages beginning with infancy all the way till death (McLeod, 2013). One particular stage that I found



## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

valuable in analyzing as it relates to the topic of Black youth is the fourth stage, also known as School Age (see Figure 1).

Stage	Psychosocial Crisis	Basic Virtue	Age
1	Trust vs. mistrust	Hope	Infancy ( 0 to1 ½)
2	Autonomy vs. shame	Will	Early Childhood ( 1 ½ to3)
3	Initiative vs. guilt	Purpose	Play Age ( 3 to 5)
4	Industry vs. inferiority	Competency	School Age ( 5 to 12)
5	Ego identity vs. Role Confusion	Fidelity	Adolescence (12 to 18)
6	Intimacy vs. isolation	Love	Young Adult ( 18 to 40)
7	Generativity vs. stagnation	Care	Adult hood( 40 to 65)
8	Ego integrity vs. despair	Wisdom	Maturity ( 65+)

Figure 1 Erickson Stages of Development (McLeod, 2013)

At these time children become exposed to academia. During each stage, Erickson suggests that some type of psychosocial crisis will occur. In the fourth stage that crisis is of industry versus inferiority. Children during this time are adapting to new demands whether that be academic or social. If the youth during this time is greatly supported, via family, friends, teachers and developing healthy habits, the results will yield a sense of competence, whereas the opposite results in sentiments of inferiority (Erickson). While this seems like a very abstract concept, Erickson suggest that we analyze this while considering societal and cultural contributions, in order to truly understand its functionality (McLeod,2013).

In the context of historic Black neighborhoods, it is important to compare how societal and cultural norms shaped youth during the prominent years of these neighborhoods. Although

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

racial codes were heavily enforced and poverty and other forms of oppression were prevalent, residents' daily environment and interaction with one another as a Black community proved otherwise. The golden years of these communities actively provided youth with examples of resiliency and attempted to dismantle race related inferiority rhetoric. The rest of this paper will unpack the approaches to positive youth development in historic Black neighborhoods through Afrocentric pedagogy, cultural arts and holistic support taking into consideration Erickson's concept of development and additional theories.

### **The role of Afrocentric Pedagogy in Education**

In Columbus, the Near East Side has played an important role in the education system. In fact, it was where some of most significant milestones in education occurred. In 2016, it is not rare to hear about schools in Black neighborhoods and communities of color to be among some of the lowest performing. In 2014, the Center for American Progress published a report that suggested "Teachers expect students of color and low-income students to graduate college at lower rates than white students" (Segal, 2014) One of the most critical propositions made during this study was that some of these expectations might have come from the general and wider spread issues within the education system itself. The education system in this country has proven not only by theory but also by litigation to be an extended arm of institutional racism. According to a Psychologist at Rutgers University, "teachers often expect the least from students who could benefit the most from higher expectations" (Segal, 2014). Such examples mirror the reality of Erickson's stage four crises impacting black youth. How do we expect black youth to develop positively and desire success if their environments, both socially and culturally, view them as inferior, even much earlier before they can conceptually develop this idea on their own?

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

The socio-psychological effects share systemic roots in the city, especially as it relates to education. In Columbus, Ohio the legislation of 1829 read that all Black youth were excluded from the public education system (Commodore, 2010). Although debarred, Black communities began to fund their own institutions of learning, which of course was led and maintained by Black leaders and heavily supported by the community. Through consistency, both through direct action and implementation, African Americans in Columbus were able to establish their own school district, one that would finally be recognized by the rest of the white majority. This began to connect the Black community to funding sources outside of their own municipals that had been unattainable because of racial codes. As the community began to flourish, the Near East side welcomed a total of 4 schools to their district, “By 1855, four black separate schools existed. Two of the schools were located on Gay Street, one on High Street and the other on Town Street” (Commodore, 2010, p.5). African Americans from all across the city were being educated in the heart of Bronzeville.

Eventually, by the turn of the early 1900’s, Columbus began to integrate schools with the white majority anticipating that Black students were to graduate from high school at low probability. This reinforced race supremacy ideology among white youth which explicitly named African American students to be unfit in competition of the job market, essentially preserving benefits for the white majority. When schools began to integrate, there was a decline in African American teachers, which is comparable to academia today. The deep rooted connection and history of these communities and litigation are often overlooked in education reform and ideally help perpetuate a never ending cycle of underperforming schools. (Commodore, 2010)

In 1954, *Brown vs. Board of Education* was mandated, whilst this took place, cities across the country began to unmercifully permit Black youth to partake in the general school

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

system. Till this day many schools in urban communities face isolation and have remained segregated because of systemic and inequitable practices, which have further marginalized communities of color and skillfully widen the gap of economic prosperity. One practice that has been used to combat the normative standards of low expectations placed upon Black youth in education has been through African Centered Curricula and Afrocentric Education. What is African Centered Curriculum and how does it contribute to positive youth development and academic excellence, one may ask, and is it disconnecting black youth from society? According to several intellectuals in the field, Afrocentric education can be summarized as merely a response to the crisis and the nature of the educational system, its inability to provide for black youth both socially and culturally (Cornelius, p. 11). It is truly a paradigm shift to profess that perhaps traditional Western methods of education may not be so equipping to sustain black academic success, which may assume the reasoning behind prominent Black communities and cities accepting alternative solutions, such as African centered homeschooling and Afrocentric Academies, more especially in recent times.

One example of this thought is Freedom Home Academy International (FHAI), which is situated in Chicago, Illinois and founded by Marcus Kline. The school, which is an independent institution focuses on Cultural Enrichment, Focus, Geography, Health, Mathematics, Reading, and Science through a holistic African Centered approach (Kline, 2016). Additionally, scholars also are offered courses such as; Kiswahili, French, Piano and Tai Chi. In Freire's Stages of Consciousness (Conscientizacao), one of the most imperative concepts of his pedagogy is the-- culture of silence, "the oppressed people feel ignorant and they become dependent on the culture of the oppressors, the so-called 'experts', specialist in society" (Fritze, 2006, p. 3), while doing so oppressed groups internalize "myths" about oneself, only to be left silent. While watching a

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

video provided on the school's website of the "Annual Academy Expo Award Ceremony", you begin to realize the authenticity and effectiveness of this approach. Their vision states that they not only believe in the potential that their youth possess but also state that their students "have the potential that reaches far beyond our limited-and-limiting-perception of society" (Kline, 2016), which can be observed not only through the video but how well thought out and executed their teaching methods present themselves.

FHAI recognizes that when historically oppressed people have been silenced overtime, it can be emotionally and physically taxing effects on communities. To attempt to prioritize unlearning certain practices and behaviors, the limited and limiting perception, Kline sheds light needs intensive time and practice. Fascinating enough, FHAI acknowledges that not everyone is fully ready to take on this school model. Although families may be seeking a change in direction as it relates to educating their child, it is often difficult to fully invest in non-traditional methods, which is to what Freire notes as "the mechanism of false consciousness" (Fritze, 2006, p.3).

Although for generations the traditional American education system has troubled Black youth and their families, Black communities find it hard to part ways with mainstream education and to trust a place of decolonizing education. For this reason, the school will not admit a student during the pre-screening, with the understanding that not every student and family find it fitting for their student's social and behavioral disposition. Through the African Centered approach, scholars or *warriors* as they call them, are unpacking the elements of their worldview to ensure that they are able to critically navigate successfully within a competitive society. The curriculum is considered rigorous and demanding, which sometimes can be a concern for parents based upon many factors, both socially and culturally. For example, some families wonder; if a Black student handle such curricula and be successful? Is this even necessary, does learning one's

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

history provide for a future of success? Remarkably enough, similar questions are being proposed in public school districts, specifically pertaining to Black youth success. When Africans were brought to this country as slaves, one of the first ways slave-owners gained control was through denying Africans their identity, the changing of names and stripping away of native tongues. In the example below, you will see how imperative it is to FHAI to not only have a curriculum which empowers youth to be successful because of their heritage, but also in the way can utilize identifiable African terminology to reflect on their personal and collective history.

Azania Grade level – Pre-school 2-4 years

Togo Grade level – Kindergarten through 1st Grade

Congo Grade level – 2nd Grade through 3rd Grade

Mau Mau Grade level - 4th through 5th Grade

Uganda Grade level - 6th through 7th Grade

Zimbabwe Grade level - 8th Grade (Kline, 2016)

Freedom Home School International makes an interesting comparison to Columbus's only African Centered School, Afrocentric Early College K-12 opened its doors in the 90's, and has currently one of the city's newest school revitalization projects. An estimated over \$30 million was invested in the new campus (Bush, 2014). However, Afrocentric does not serve as an independent institution, but is part of the local public school system. Since independence and ownership are ideals heavily praised in African centered instruction, schools like Afrocentric sometimes are viewed as commercialized liberation models.

While the conversation around liberation curricula in Afrocentric schools evolves, we are beginning to see a shift in acceptance towards culturally centered pedagogy in mainstream

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

education. Although some say it poses limitations, we as a society are observing a transfer in acceptance and push against the culture of silence; westernized/traditional education. According to an article written by OZY in 2015, entitled *Save Afrocentric Schools, Save History*, the first Afrocentric High School was created in Toronto in 2013 with a small student population of 20; the group performed so well that the school officials began to “propose opening a school with a First Nations centered curriculum (Zublin, 2015)”. Although this just one example of how cultural education is being utilized for positive youth development, it also highlights the shared struggles of communities that have been silenced and the influence they take from one another in order to change societal norms.

### **Art Empowerment and Engagement**

Art as a principle expresses an individual’s feelings and provides others with an authentic perspective on the wide-ranging realities of humanity. The influence of art on one’s community can be very telling as to how people’s identities are shaped. So much of my life can be explained through various mediums of art, whether it be through musical performances, painting or poetry. At an early age, my father always immersed us with art; it was a great way for us to our own Eritrean culture and other around the world. Although we had very little growing up, my father became inspired and through a lottery system we were blessed to attend an alternative school in the heart of Columbus, Ohio located in the Near East Side. This school’s philosophy was centered on creative group art and self-expression. We worked on group murals each year and witnessed performances by West African dance groups on many occasions. This early and constant exposure to art made me realize the significance and importance in non-traditional methods in youth development. Now as an adult, I find myself seeking art in my community to explain the complexity of emotions I feel only a daily basis. On the Near East Side, creative

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

expression and empowerment has contributed immensely to the sustainability of the areas rich history. The neighborhood is not only home to some of the greatest local talent in Columbus, but also well-known national and globally recognized talent.

When you speak of the NES and art appreciation, you cannot help but to utter the names Aminah Robinson, Elijah Pierce and Kojo Kamau (Columbus Landmarks, 2014). What is remarkable about each of these artists is their extreme talent and contribution a great to the neighborhood, but also their engagement in mentorship. Aminah Robinson a Pointdexter native and one of the most eclectic artist took inspiration from the stories her uncle would share with her about the infamous Black Berry Patch. Her art celebrates community and what it meant to be part of The Village. In a featured story written by the *Columbus Dispatch*, she stated that with the demolition of Point Dexter Village and urban development taking place in the neighborhood, “she would love to see an art center take of part of that space so that future generations might see and remember what once was” (Ravish, 2013). Robinson, up until her passing in 2015, created art that not only showcased the vibrant lifestyles of the Point Dexter Village and Black Berry Patch but also the stories of unsung heroes and the complexity of the African American life during critical times.

As a child I recollect going to the Columbus Metropolitan Library, and noticing the three story staircase mural created by Aminah Robinson; it was dreamlike with its colors, and as an adolescent my first exposure to African American Heritage in art form. Granted many people left the area after integration, Aminah believed in passing on the legacy. She remained active in the community, as an Art Instructor at the local recreation center, and purchased a home in the neighborhood.



## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

In 1987, the Near East Side opened its doors for the city's one of a kind, "oasis for cultural and educational activities", the King Arts Complex. This came after the renovation of the Pythian Theater, one of the many Near East Side gems whose fate was detrimentally impacted by the highway construction in previous years. Thankfully, the King Arts Complex has been able to provide a wealth of programming for youth with a multidisciplinary approach that highlights ongoing cultural and social contributions made by African Americans, which typically go unnoticed. Throughout the year there are ample of events for youth to take part in, such as seasonal youth camps and community led workshops. The King Arts Complex is able to attract the attention of families in the community, and those who were displaced due to urban development and renewal projects during the neighborhood's prime. Their ability to connect both history of Black people and their contributions to Columbus and globally has made a significant impact on the city's cultural art scene ([kingartscomplex.com](http://kingartscomplex.com)).

Freire's stage "cultural action for freedom" (Fritze, 2006), in my opinion reflects the remarkable contributions that have been made by the organizations like the King Arts Complex. Presently speaking, the complex will be bringing youth from across the city to take part in a camp that will pay homage to the Black Arts Movement, in the form of a summer camp. The camp engages youth in innumerable mediums of art forms, including writers, musicians' artist dramatists. Youth will be given the chance to connect with local artists who contribute to the ongoing revolution to empower and liberate Black minds. This is imperative at a time where the Black Lives Matter Movement forces critical conversations around liberation of historically oppressed groups and allyship.

Freire's work has influenced many people working in the field of youth development. Shawn Ginwright (2002), a notable expert on African American youth development, discusses

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

“Social Justice Youth Development” as the pairing of both worlds of social action and critical consciousness. This approach can be used to outline the work that the King Arts Complex is invested in through its youth programming. Ginwright states:

Key to self-awareness is an understanding of how identity is closely tied to privilege or oppression through the use and/or misuse of power. Once a young people see the connection between identity and power relationships, they develop healthy self-awareness that recognizes how oppression and privilege mark their own struggles and the struggle of others (Ginwright, 2002, p.89).

It is my belief that spaces for artistic intellect that recognize lived experiences and history, broadens the scope for positive youth development programming to take place organically. These experiences can enhance and promote a healthy transition into adulthood, where youth are to contribute greatly to society at large and their own communities. From this artistic expression, youth are able to reflect on the culture that has shaped their internalized oppression and create positive action and expression to liberate generations to come. Socially conscious education through art has the potential to alter the way we consider future legislation, while magnifying opportunities for change that bring inclusive spaces for silenced voices. The Near East Side has a distinctive presence because of its connection to past resident. Places like the King Arts Complex continue to be a place where people can continuously feel connected while making efforts to change the overall experience for neighborhood youth

### **Holistic Support**

Erickson’s development model, stresses the importance of development at each stage in our lives, no matter what stage of our lives we are in, we have the ability to impact our communities. When assisting people, we serve, often we see a lack in providing holistic support.

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

As humans, many aspects of our being are prioritize and segmented, and not allowing us to realize our potential or contributions because of the barriers we face. This is a theme that I constantly examined when I began my service year with City Year Columbus in 2012. During my two service years, I became exposed to a model called “Whole School, Whole Child”. City Year, an international non-profit organization which began in 1998, attacks the “cradle to prison pipeline” by utilizing young idealists to transform high poverty neighborhoods and low performing schools through holistic support. Overtime the organization, which once solely focused on community service as an agent for youth empowerment, expanded its efforts to address educational disparities in the United States and since then eventually made its way to England and South Africa. This redirection has led to a more globally diverse conversation around neighborhood based positive youth development. While serving with City Year, I began to understand the importance of holistic support. I witnessed firsthand the benefit of being able to support not only students whom I worked with, but aiding teachers as well as taking part in extra curriculum programming in order to improve school culture and morale (City Year).

Given our nation’s history of systemic oppression facing many communities of color, it is essential that we create programs and organizations that honor and support multiple aspects of ones’ experience, or as Erickson would say, both crisis and virtues. In 1994, Geoffrey Canada launched the Harlem Children’s Zone, an organization that developed a neighborhood-based system of community-building programs, education and social services. “The idea of the HCZ was to rely upon a web of social services and programs all working in tandem to insulate children and their families from the disadvantaged conditions that surrounded and sometimes even threatened their lives” (Franklin County, 2003). For communities that had been impacted by intergenerational trauma, this model was in many ways revolutionary, because of its

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

suggestive approach to education reform. The Harlem Children Zone's approach was to disrupt the prison pipeline by offering a positive alternative, "Cradle to College" (Franklin County, 2003).

In the beginning the organization focused on one block, their initial step was to take "expectant parents" in the area through "Baby College" (Franklin County 2013), which was an engaging workshop that provided parents with various strategies that would be instrumental in their child's development. These workshops included information on discipline tactics, early childhood enrichment and the importance of reading aloud. In addition to the workshops, the program also provided families with wrap around services that would help sustain positive youth development as their child matured. This would include tenant housing co-ops, health and wellness resources with a focus on obesity and asthma, as well as training and work development. As for additional members of the family, it followed much of the same suite; older siblings were provided with prevention aids that helped address truancy prevention and delivered after school and extracurricular activities.

So how does this connect to Columbus, Ohio? Each year the city of Columbus host the Champion of Children event, and in 2013 the theme was Why Neighborhoods Matter to Education (Franklin County 2013). The event shared findings in its public report which analyzed the relationships between revitalization efforts, local neighborhoods, as well as child health and development. This comprehensive report discussed both local successes and challenges, while also identifying national trends that may be prompt citizens of Columbus to take action and confront issues from a different perspective than in the past. The first two questions raised in understanding child outcomes and neighborhood are as followed:

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

- Have neighborhoods that have experiences significant reinvestment produced improved conditions for children and schools?
- Have we sufficiently invested in the neighborhoods that need revitalization the most?

In order to sufficiently answer the question, the report acknowledges the importance of referencing the past, present and future to identify optimal paths for success. The report also early on mentions the Harlem Children's Zone as a promising model because of its powerful integration of development and neighborhood development. Thinking back to Erickson's model on development and the above model provided by the annual report, I began to contemplate how often we examine these complexities, such as parenting and home environment during transitional period.

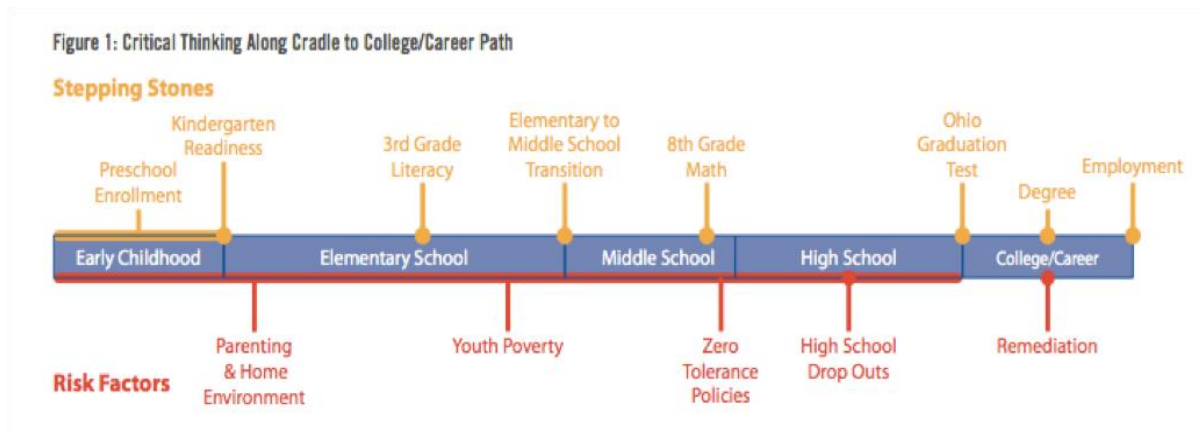


Figure 2 Champion of Children Report (Franklin County 2013)

The graph above allows communities to observe a youth's life span up until college. In many communities of color, this time period that is often heavily impacted by the cradle to prison pipeline. Although the graph does not represent a span of an individual's whole life as Erickson's ensures us, it highlights the risk factors on the bottom that may negatively impact a child's positive development as he or she completes each stepping stone. What is also important to notice is that this model refers to cradle to college /career path which reflects optimism and positive progression to take place during these formative years. When reviewing the model, I began to

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

reflect underlying message represented “risk factors”, and its ties to what Erickson refers to as “Crisis” (McLeod 2013). It is relevant that while we also see factors as the contributing elements of “crisis” such as youth poverty, that we bring positive youth development programs and initiatives which can equally complement the “virtues” Erickson list, I hope to outweigh the bad overtime. For example, during the middle school phase, Zero Tolerance Policies impacts many of Black youth. In fact, according to the report, “In the 1970s the suspension rate was 6% for African American students and 3% for white students. In 2006 those numbers had increased to 15% and 5%, respectively” (Franklin County, 2003, p.3).

It is well documented that African American students are disproportionately impacted by Zero Tolerance Policies is due to racial bias which the report also covers. Currently in the Columbus there are many grassroots organization collaborating on efforts to integrate Restorative Justice Practices. These practices allow for define alternative discipline protocol, in efforts to disrupt the prison to pipeline trajectory. I see this as a worthy example to uphold and heavily focus on the positive virtue Erickson calls Love (McLeod, 2013). Many youth during this stage in their adolescence lack self-worth, and compassion for others. By mentioning this, I’m stating that it would be naïve of us to realistically acknowledge Erickson’s work without understanding the complexity of children’s lives and how they are viewed in society by others and the risks we impart. If we lack investment in certain groups of people as Black youth, how do we expect society to support these same individuals as adults?

In order to provide sustainable support, the report stresses the need to address and respond to the past. The history of the Near East Side is an important community in Columbus

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

that has overcome many obstacles. Now as a new wave of urban renewal projects make way, the city of Columbus is working to ensure that some of the past mistakes do not impact historic neighborhoods. The figure below (f. 3) goes over the causes of potential outcomes of urban renewal. One of the key reasons why the Harlem Children’s Zone is so essential is the fact that it strategically addresses the gentrification model, which has historically displaced residents and destroyed Black communities. In the Near East Side, we are currently witnessing neighborhood services created and schools being revitalized; though this is only a start the hope is to uplift the community members who are currently residing in the area while simultaneously engaging community oriented enterprises to the area. The significance of these revitalization efforts must ensure that the current youth living in the Near East Side witness the transition of their neighborhoods through each phase.

<b>Gentrification</b>	<b>Revitalization</b>
Replacement of existing housing stock with less affordable, higher value housing.	Mixed income housing development.
Existing residents unable to accrue wealth, remain highly susceptible to displacement.	Wealth building strategies for existing residents implemented, residents stabilized from displacement pressure.
Existing social networks, neighborhood services and local businesses disrupted in the community.	Social networks, neighborhood services and businesses reinforced in the community. Additional new business and services expand options for all residents.
Community transitions to one that is inaccessible to low-income households.	Community transitions to a mixed income, mixed wealth and diverse community.

Figure 3 (Franklin County, 2013, p.21)

For the youth who previously grew up in the Near East Side, the neighborhood played a significant part in their upbringing and values. The mere fact that people often worked and played in the neighborhood created accountability and has since attributed to countless success

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

stories. This idea reminded me of an African proverb: “If you want to go quickly go alone, if you want to go far go together” (Chamberlin, 2014). In 2016, communities like the Near East Side for a multitude of reasons have become disconnected whether that be lack of businesses or street violence. Many youth are left with the impression that you must go alone quickly, which is contrary to the beliefs of what was once part of the neighborhood. In an environment glorified by poverty and violence youth may unintentionally be provoked by the “Crabs-in-a bucket” mindset, causing future disconnect with the communities in which they come from.

One organization that is reinvigorating the spirit of shared accountability is Learning Circles. This is an online platform that engages both schools and youth serving organizations, to analyze student data as it pertains to academics, behavior and attendance. Learning Circles allows for organizations efforts to be intensively focused on the child’s all around well-being and ensures that programming is specialized in meeting those needs. In the 2015 Champion of Children Report there is a section entitled “Rodney’s Story” (p.9). Rodney was a youth who had been a part of the Milo-Grogan Boys and Girls Club, located in the Near East Side, for nearly six years. Overtime, Rodney’s grades began to slip and his life became more chaotic. Although the Boys and Girls Club had a strong relationship with Rodney, there would be no true way of identifying his academic needs unless he or his family brought it to the staff’s attention.

The Club partnered with Learning Circles and was able to track his progress and help Rodney develop a plan that was central to some of the barriers he was encountering at school. Because of Rodney’s chaotic home life, he looked to the Boys and Girls Club as a place to incorporate peace into his schedule. Rodney was quoted saying that “he had never had anyone at home pushing him to do better in school” (Franklin County, 2015, p.9). Although Learning Circles serves as an education database, its ability to integrate community in a visionary way has



## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

greatly impacted youth in Columbus. Often times there is an unbalanced relationship between schools and families for many reasons. This signals the importance for use of revolutionary technology that has the ability to counteract such inequities facing youth, thus confirming a whole child, whole community approach.

My objective for this study was to identify positive youth development trends impacting the African American community in historic neighborhoods and communities through the following three ways:

- Identify strategies and/or implementation of programs that have positively impacted black youth both at the local and national level.
- Analyze trends and outcomes of positive youth development to better understand how systemic issues can be tackled through sustainable initiatives.
- Recommend resources and bring attention to initiatives that will be viable in carrying out the fundamentals of liberation theory suggested by Paulo Freire, as well as contribute to the positive development and growth of successful Black communities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Presentation and Analysis of Data**

For the purpose of this study and to seek to understand from a community lens, my study utilized a community –based participatory research approach and place-based research approach. I deemed these approaches to be most relevant because they focus on the people most affected by the issues and those who are constantly working to find solutions or interventions. The primary goal is to give power to the community by sharing their stories and celebrating their successes.

*Community-Based Participatory Approach* (Burns, Cooke, Schweidler, 2011) is a method that challenges the way we typically view traditional approaches to research. Although I view myself as a member of the community, it was important for me to understand that as a

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

researcher, that the concerns of people of the community were placed before my own personal concerns. This framework identifies the community issues, recommends next steps, and then utilizes the research to engage community members to gauge effectiveness. In the Community Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR), it is imperative to identify stakeholders throughout the process. This is useful and implies that the research consistently focuses deeply on the community and its needs at every step of the way. This was important for me because as a community organizer and a Program Coordinator working with youth in the neighborhood, I am always looking for research that can guide my work and encourage me to invest in the process fully, while simultaneously delivering services to the community. According to the Advancement Project-Healthy City, CBPAR focuses on the following basic tenants (Burns, Cooke, Schweidler, 2011, p. 5) :

- Community knowledge is irreplaceable and provides key insights that ground-truths administrative data
- Complex social issues often cannot be well understood or resolved by “expert” research
- Interventions from outside of the community have often had disappointing results
- Communities should have equal inclusion and collaboration in the identification, research, and resolution of community issues
- There is value and legitimacy in the knowledge of individuals, families, and others in the community

### *Place-Based Research*

In conjunction with the CBPAR, I also utilized place-based research. Because my research focused on the prominence of the community and its impact specifically on the Black

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

youth it was imperative to utilize this approach. Place-Based Research promises “that those who represent that place, particularly those who reside there, ground this research with their unique perspectives and experiences” (Burns, Cooke, Schweidler, 2011, p. 6). I considered Place-Based Research to help me solidify my literature review. It was important for me to find research that was comprehensive and utilized community-engaged mapping and also writings that included the voices of the community, specifically Black academic writers. Often times when researching communities of color, specifically Black communities, the content can be somewhat limiting because you may not find direct quotations from residents, just abbreviated versions or summaries of the community needs. With this in mind, I was empowered to identify and conduct an in-depth interview with someone who had a considerable amount of experience and love for the community. First of all, professionally, either working at a local organization or invested in youth development work in The NES or secondly, someone who grew up in the neighborhood, as my research relates to youth development.

### **My Subjectivity**

As a researcher who has grown up as a Black youth in Columbus, my presence showcases my genuine commitment to diasporic Black communities and experiences, this gives me an upper hand on receiving an abundance of information from interviewees. As I mentioned previously, I am currently employed at the Columbus Urban League, but in the future hope to either own property that will preserve the history of the NES or create a non-profit that is geared to empowering Black youth in Columbus, Ohio. Some of my subjectivity also comes from my identity and cultural background, I identify as Black, Eritrean and Pan African. To me all three terms are relative, it is not that I am one more than the other but they all contribute to my worldview and perspective on liberation as it relates to Black communities, both domestically

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

and internationally. Although my family lineage is not rooted in the history of The NES, my affiliations both personally and professionally inspire me to be dedicated to the preservation of the neighborhood.

### **Data Collection**

I obtained my information through following ways:

*Case Studies and Annual Reports:* From an evaluation perspective, it was helpful to utilize case studies and annual reports to capture results of initiatives and programs impacting Black youth and to identify statistical data that can showcase how Black youth are impacted by various struggles in urban and historic black neighborhoods. Case studies and annual reports were very useful because the information was consolidated and often times provides additional questioning, to show how and why studies evolve. An example of this is a case study on the Harlem Children's Zone, which focuses on holistic support within a historic Black community. Harlem at one time was the Black Mecca, a place that greatly contributed to the Black conscious movement in this country. The Harlem Children's Zone has been a topic of discussion for some time now, and with many urban renewal plans underway, many cities are asking themselves if such a model could be replicated across the nation.

The Near East Side is a great place to research not only because of its rich history and of the current cultural investments taking place that are increasingly becoming well documented and publicly recorded. Some of these development projects are linked to The Ohio State University, with the Kirwan Institute on Race and Ethnicity who are able to capture the impact of urban development as it relates to historically disenfranchised communities through its work with the annual Champion for Children reports, as well as their own programming. These types

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

of evaluations on Black communities have typically been misinformed and biased or rarely receive coverage on mainstream media for effective practices and strategies.

*Community Mapping:* The Kirwan Institute was a great resource for identifying trends through community mapping. Community and Opportunity mapping as a means for participatory action research allows the researcher and reader to visualize trends that have had a significant impact on community overtime while also preparing for future developments. In 2018 the Columbus Urban League affiliate of the will be hosting the National Urban League Conference, which includes the Youth Summit. Currently I sit on the national planning committee for the Youth Summit, and in the future I will be expected to bring in community agencies that have a focus on youth development to join us in planning for our host year. Community mapping will be useful for arranging opportunities for neighborhood youth to become more engaged with the city's upcoming conference.

*Participant Observations:* I attended several community events over the course of my research in the NES. Additionally, I have been able to witness community members' interactions by attending different events, as well as being familiar with how the Columbus Urban League serves the community. Participant observations also gave me perspective on how much or how little the youth were incorporated in organizing efforts. My observations are weaved throughout my paper.

*In-Depth Interview:* During my interview I was able to connect with a community member who is an advocate for neighborhood youth and currently working in the NES; the participant has acquired a great deal of knowledge of the history of The NES in addition to ongoing developments in the area.

*Additional Readings:*

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

I utilized both local and national resources that look at characteristics of positive youth development services in historic black communities. It is important to note that in order to understand how youth empowerment is being perceived, received and developed in Historic Black Communities (HBC), that we start at the root; the history. Reading up on the history of the neighborhood and similar communities gave me an understanding of how people developed overtime and what contributed to their positive growth. It is also important to note how history's role is always fundamental in any work, especially when discussing matters relating to oppressed groups. Equally as significant, acknowledging the presence of one's history opens our eyes to the erasure of people's experiences, which I believe to be key in serving Black youth as a means of survival. Additionally, the literature provided will guide my knowledge by identifying relevant practices and attributes that have and will continue to aspire and empower Black youth.

Initially my plan was to carry out a focus group and an in-depth interview. When I first began, I did an extensive literature review to identify prominent community leaders and change agents. I looked at local articles, current videos and attended community events and celebrations. This year, I helped pilot the Columbus Urban League's Mentoring Initiative. During the launch of my program, I was able to connect with community leaders from all over the city interested in partnership or sharing of resources.

One of my first meetings was with the Franklinton Board of Trade, which focuses on community efforts in the West side of Columbus. After expressing my interest in learning more about youth development in The NES, I was given a list of potential community leaders to engage with. From there I did further research to learn more about their connections to The NES and current level of commitment to youth. My next meeting was with the Columbus Foundation, which is an organization that acts as a philanthropic advisor and more importantly invests in

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

community projects. This was important because the Columbus Foundation is currently evaluating and monitoring a revitalization project in Weinland Park, another historic Columbus neighborhood. The neighborhood is significant for developers as it surrounds The Ohio State University's campus. One of the largest schools in the nation.

Although these meetings were rather informal, they helped guide my research and helped me identify key stakeholders in the community. From there, I emailed three prospects and called one to briefly introduce myself and to ask if they would be interested in the overall concept of my capstone. I was only able to get through to one person, which led me to conduct only one in-depth interview, abandoning the idea of a focus group.

Once the participant responded, I provided him with the necessary documentation to gain better understanding of my research. I ensured the participant that he would remain anonymous throughout the whole process. In order to accommodate the participant, I allowed the candidate to choose the location for the interview to take place and at what time. We met in downtown, Columbus, Ohio at the North Market, on a busy Saturday afternoon. The participant had a chance to review the questions before, but was also ensured that the questioning was to act as a guide rather than a formal structure. The interviewee was late to the interview due to family conflict and was told that the interview could be rescheduled at any time if he felt rushed or unable to meet. The interview proceeded a later time that day, with ease and stayed within the given time frame. Before the interview began, the candidate was read aloud the terms indicated in the HSR, and signed.

After the interview, I conducted series of transcribing sessions. The beginning was focused on transcribing text for accuracy and for potential quotes. After that I began to listen for the three themes highlighted as positive youth development trends. I also went back and took

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

into account the flow of questioning, and analyzed areas of interest where the interviewee became more fixated.

### **Limitations**

My biggest conflict was time, which I can explain through two ways. The first being, both research approaches that I used focus on longer research projects that commonly result support funded community projects. My research utilized the two research approaches as guides, given that time was limited, I was unable to present the full scope and impact of these strategies. With more time, I could emphasize the in-depth evaluation and monitoring aspect of the research models and include more community participation via interviews, focus group and perhaps youth voices and or parent surveys. Another way time impacted my research was the limited time to create a focus group. With a quick turnaround time and lack of response, it became impossible to carry out. A second limitation was not directly interviewing youth or parents. It would have been productive to have the perspective of youth who are impacted by the three themes that I referenced in my research, as well as the parents to wage the intergenerational elements affecting positive youth development. I also believe some potential limitations came from the type of research I conducted; there was an absence of probability sampling. With a variety of sampling it is my belief that additional trends and themes could have been identified. On a personal note, I feel as a researcher whose familial roots are linked to East Africa could pose as a limitation to some regard. Although I identify as Black, I question what my thought process would have looked like as an African American born and raised in Columbus, Ohio. It is not uncommon to meet African American's in the city who at one point had ties to the Near East Side, via Pointdexter Village or to one of the many businesses from the avenue.

### **Findings**



## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

**Background:** The interviewee has worked in the area for nearly 10 years at one of the most prominent organizations in The Near East Side. He is a young professional that is engaged in many organizations and initiatives that impact Black youth. The interviewee shared that in middle-school he was awarded a full-ride scholarship to Ohio State through a program called Young Scholars. That year, only 7-10 youth were awarded this highly competitive scholarship and, the applicant's mother would share the news with everyone she came in contact with because she was so proud of where this could potentially lead her child. This greatly impacted the candidate's outlook on education and positive youth development early on and inspired many of the decisions that he would make in the future.

**Cultural Arts:** The candidate was happy to see appreciation for the neighborhood's history through the creation of the Long St. Cultural Wall. The wall covers a highway bridge that once separated residents of the NES from the rest of the city. The wall recognizes the work of African American pioneers in Columbus from famous musicians, to leading organizations. The interviewee shared with excitement and frustration the lack of knowledge many of the neighborhood youth have of prominent artist and historical figures that contributed to the foundation of the neighborhood. A lot of the current development is centered on cultural arts of the neighborhood.

**African Centered Education:** The candidate shared that it was important for the youth to know their history and that would have to be done by implementing it into mainstream school curriculum. The reason being that it allows for the youth to understand their current predicament, which could motivate them to pay it forward to others. In three years, we will reach quadricentennial of the beginning of slavery in the United States. This is important for youth to know to reference and celebrate the victories. Lack of education based on identity may be a

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

reason for why youth “act out”, because of the intergenerational oppression—“all of the brainwashing, all of the lies”. If it was not for college, and the Africana courses offered there, many Black youth would not be exposed to this knowledge. Additionally, the interviewee saw this lack of knowledge as being very troublesome because the Black community is growing and becoming more diverse, not only made up of African Americans but Black immigrants and refugees as well, sometimes all living in the same communities. The candidate also made references to how lack of knowing your personal history can be a damaging to your lineage; if you do not comprehend the sacrifices made in order for you to be where you are today, you will celebrate the wrong things. The candidate felt that because of this, many of the Black youth find themselves influenced by wrong things; glorifying ignorance and having a difficult time changing the narrative to a positive one. The interviewee summed up his feelings of frustration by saying “Their ancestors were killed if they showed they had intelligence”.

***Holistic Support:*** Many of the organizations in the area are not restricted to serving the youth in the neighborhood. For example, at the interviewee’s organization, they take in youth for seasonal programming from all across the city. The programming usually centers around cultural arts and identity and is usually advertised on their website and other forms of media but mostly through word of mouth and active parent or family participation. There is a cost associated with their programs and although they give out scholarships for potential applicants, the parent’s interest is the driving force if the child will be admitted into the program. He also suggested that both African American communities and Black immigrant and refugee communities get to know one another well enough so that they could be able to create stronger networks for support.

### **Discussions**

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

This year we inducted a new mayor of Columbus, Ohio and soon enough will witness the transition of national presidential leadership. These changes in essence can greatly impact the types of conversations taking place regarding the fate of Black youth and their respective communities. Researching the current trends taking place in the United States in many ways inspired me, while also encouraging me to expand my knowledge of Black liberation and struggle on macro-level through youth development. One takeaway is that we are increasingly seeing more literature and documentation being reported on community oriented research, which is then utilized in addressing issues in schools (cradle to prison pipeline) and additional community forums. Based on the research, much of The Near East Side's revitalization has taken place in the form of cultural art, which is what the neighborhood is known for. Many of the youth programs we see today did not always necessarily take place in the past, but were birthed out of the necessity to retain the knowledge and pride of Black people all across the diaspora. The following is a list of some of my recommendations for positive youth development, based on my gathering of information as it relates to the three themes; cultural arts, African centered education and holistic support.

### **Recommendation 1: Parcels to Places**

This project is a pilot venture that will empower community members to transform vacant property to address community needs. It is competitive in nature, meaning residents have to submit an application. This asset based approach is critical and could have the potential in bringing more youth initiatives to the area. The project as listed on the website, states that the proposals should include strategies that address the following: community space, art, food systems, economic development, to name a few.

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

Currently one grassroots organization, The Maroon Arts Group, a collective that brings awareness to social justice issues through art mediums i.e. monthly poetry nights, productions, submitted an application and has been admitted to the next round. Below is an explanation of their proposal as well as the outcomes and program ideas (Parcels to Places):

“Maroon Arts Group (MAG)’s MPACC (Movement Pursuing Arts, Commerce & Community) is an innovative endeavor that supports local artists of all genres, engages the community at large, and brings a wealth of social and economic commerce to the King Lincoln District (KLD). This summer MAG will produce programming and events around an innovative gallery and performance space constructed from reused shipping containers on a vacant lot in the KLD” ( Personal Communication)

- **MPACC Components**

Write the Power: Writer's Residency

People to Power: Community Street Takeovers

Purpose to Power: Innovative Shipping Container Gallery

Paint the Power: Interactive Arts Experiences

Present the Power: Stage Production

These are truly very exciting times for the Near East Side. Parcels to Places is one of very few that is realistically community led and will address if not all three of the indications of positive youth development I’ve highlighted. One component that resonates with me is the ability to impact positive youth experiences is the Community Street Takeovers. As my interviewee mentioned, sometimes many youth are prohibited from engaging in programming because the parents are ill-informed or uninterested. The Street Takeovers can challenge that by publicly displaying positive Black influences and entertainment in the

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

streets of the neighborhood, while simultaneously attracting residents from surrounding communities.

This leads me to my connection to Freire's "Culture of Silence" (Fritze, 2006, p.3). Land ownership is symbolic of our American history. How people were used justifiably as slaves to tend to someone's land—the idea of nurturing and maintaining another man's property while never reaping the benefits makes this project ever more so important. The fact that Black Artists in the city will be able to create sustainable projects and possibly rebirth a cultural revolution in the NES, provides more opportunities for our youth to share their stories of intergenerational silence.

### **Recommendation 2: Freedom Schools**

In 1964 a political organization by the name of SNCC, which stands for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Council of Federal Organizations, came together to organize the "Mississippi Freedom Summer Project" (CDF). This project's main aim was to engage community volunteers and activists both Black and White in strategic events that improve the voting conditions and other civil rights. During the summer many activities were held in order to reach community needs, they go as follows (CDF):

- Promoting a massive drive for voter registration among disenfranchised Blacks and coordinating a mock election;
- Creating community centers to provide weekly instruction and entertainment for Blacks;
- Conducting Freedom Schools, a summer education program to provide Black children and teenagers with a richer educational experience than was offered in Mississippi public schools; and

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

- Modeling for Mississippi children their responsibility to become a force for change in their state and nation.

Decades later and under the leadership of Marian Wright Edelman and the Children's Defense Fund's Black Community Crusade for Children campaign, the summer of 1964 was reborn in 1995 (CDF). Freedom Schools now has schools all across that nation that engage, maintain and focus on literacy, family engagement and cultural competence. The curriculum uses integrated lesson plans that are hands on and reflective of the youth's personal experience and most importantly identity. During the month of April, I had the pleasure of attending a Freedom School's fundraiser in Columbus. The level of commitment and integrity of the program captivated me. This program takes literacy to a new level by servicing youth throughout the summer, so by the end of their time they are able to transfer the items to create a home library, thus beginning the school year on a positive note. Currently there is no existing Freedom School in the Near East Side, which is why I believe this to be a strong recommendation. With a curriculum that is rooted in social justice and literacy, youth could be exposed to more of the history of their neighborhood through activities and project-based learning.

### **Recommendation 3: St Petersburg Community Museum**

The Near East Side plays a significant role in the history of Columbus and continues to stay relevant through the relentless work put forth by community agents directly impacted by the historic culture. One community in St Petersburg, Florida has inspired me with their "Remembering St. Petersburg Oral History Project" (Winn, 2012). The purpose of this project was to involve urban youth ages 14-18 from the neighborhood and elders of that area ages 65 and older. The project utilized nontraditional methods of engagement and taught youth about their neighborhood's history by connecting them to elders.

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

During the process youth collected archival materials and taped oral narratives. In *Transforming Anthropology*, Alisha Winn (2012) articulates her success and challenges some anthropologist face with heritage preservation. This article is great because Winn provides readers with a guide that illustrates the necessity of creating a successful youth oral history project in African American communities. This article resonated with me because of my observations in the community. In the Near East Side, you do not see many youth playing outside or at many of the events taking place. Many things are created for adult crowds with less focus on fun and engaging family or community initiatives, other than back to school events or summer time functions.

In fact, at the King Arts Complex, one of the main locations in the Near East Side providing cultural community events and youth initiatives, a PHD student and former Summer Camp Leader created the Family Time Initiative ([kingartscomplex.com](http://kingartscomplex.com)). A weekly initiative that provides families to explore topics such as: physical activity, nutrition and community and cultural awareness with a focus on African Diaspora. I believe a similar project such as the St Petersburg Oral Project could bridge the gap between youth and elders in the NES, while concurrently involving parents to create a significant impact on the community. One of the most important pieces that I take away from Freire's work is that liberation is a process, but in that process we must see everyone as a contributing piece. Projects such as this, could empower our youth to command a presence and to give the voice back to a history that has been silenced.

### **Conclusion**

2016 The National Urban League's Youth Summit will be held in Baltimore, Maryland. The committee is youth led and will allow them to have input in programming and implementation at all stages. This and other similar initiatives are a key component to the

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

continuous efforts made around positive youth development. Youth must continue to be engaged in a positive matter. History and the ability to use it to positively shape identity is also key. Arts must continue to be a space for the youth to express themselves where traditional words aren't enough. Holistic support is a necessity in positive youth development.

While youth should be the focus, the support system must be strong in order to ensure that systemic issues that affect the youth are met head on. Thus allowing the youth to focus on the connections made through history and art. Education must continue to be funded and this is where holistic support and Afro-centric education combine. The children are the voice and it takes an entire village to keep those voices intact. Doing so will allow them to create their own path on this road to liberation. By taking these steps not only for empowerment but support, Black adults are creating a legacy of reaching back and supporting. This legacy will create a model for the youth to follow and one that can continue on for generations to come. This is then where *Hidri*, our legacy, ceases to be just a word, but becomes implementation.



## References

- Positive Youth Development. (n.d.). Retrieved April 25, 2016, from <http://youth.gov/youth-topics/positive-youth-development>
- Burns, J. C., Cooke, D. Y., & Schweidler, C. (2011, December). Participatory Asset Mapping COMMUNITY RESEARCH COMMUNITY RESEARCH LAB TOOLBOX COMMUNITY RESEARCH LAB TOOLBOX A TOOLKIT a program of DECEMBER 2011 A Short Guide to Community Based Participatory Action Research. Retrieved March, 2016, from <http://www.labor.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/A-Short-Guide-to-Community-Based-Participatory-Action-Research.pdf>
- 2013 Franklin County Children's Report: Why Neighborhoods Matter to Education* (Rep.). (2013). Retrieved <http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/reports/2013/2013-Franklin-County-Childrens-Report.pdf>
- 2013 Franklin County Children's Report: Why Neighborhoods Matter to Education* (Rep.). (2013). Columbus, OH.
- Bean, A. (2016, February 22). What's So Bronze About the Bronzeville Neighborhood? - Chicago Detours. Retrieved April, 2016, from <http://www.chicagodetours.com/bronzeville-neighborhood/>
- Bush, B. (2014, July 17). New Africentric campus fulfills Columbus teacher's vision. Retrieved April 10, 2016, from [http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/local/2014/07/16/Africentric\\_school\\_starts\\_construction.html](http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/local/2014/07/16/Africentric_school_starts_construction.html)
- CDF Freedom Schools® Program. (n.d.). Retrieved March, 2016, from <http://www.childrendefense.org/programs/freedomschools/>

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

*CHAMPION OF 2015 CHILDREN REPORT: Boys of Color, Boys at Risk* (Publication). (2015).

Columbus, OH: United Way. Retrieved from [http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/UWO-023-ChampionOfChildrenReport.FALR3\\_.pdf](http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/UWO-023-ChampionOfChildrenReport.FALR3_.pdf)

Chamberlin, S. (2014, November 18). "If You Want to Go Fast, Go Alone. If You Want to Go Far, Go Together." And If You Want to Transform...? Retrieved March 20, 2016, from <http://www.kosmosjournal.org/news/if-you-want-to-go-fast-go-alone-if-you-want-to-go-far-go-together-and-if-you-want-to-transform/>

Chay, K., & Munshi, K. (2011, December). *Black Mobilization After Emancipation: Evidence from Reconstruction and the Great Migration* [Scholarly project]. Retrieved from [http://econ.as.nyu.edu/docs/IO/23211/Munshi\\_04172012.pdf](http://econ.as.nyu.edu/docs/IO/23211/Munshi_04172012.pdf)

Chinue, C. *Afrocentric Education And Its Importance In African American Children And Youth Development and Academic Excellence* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). San Francisco State University. Retrieved February/March, 2016, from [https://www.academia.edu/7146552/Afrocentric\\_Education\\_And\\_Its\\_Importance\\_In\\_African\\_American\\_Children\\_And\\_Youth\\_Development\\_and\\_Academic\\_Excellence\\_Ch2.\\_Lit\\_Review](https://www.academia.edu/7146552/Afrocentric_Education_And_Its_Importance_In_African_American_Children_And_Youth_Development_and_Academic_Excellence_Ch2._Lit_Review).

Commodore, L. D. (2010). *African Americans in Columbus City Schools A Historical Perspective* [Scholarly project]. Retrieved from <http://u.osu.edu/gordon.3/files/2012/06/Laura-commodore.pdf>

Fritz, C. (n.d.). The Theory of Paulo Freire. Retrieved from [http://www.stclares.ca/pdfs/The\\_Theory\\_of\\_Paulo\\_Freire.pdf](http://www.stclares.ca/pdfs/The_Theory_of_Paulo_Freire.pdf)

Jax, B. (2009). *The Soul of a City Bronzeville: An Early African American Neighborhood in Columbus, OH* [Scholarly project]. Retrieved from

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

<http://u.osu.edu/gordon.3/files/2012/06/Beth-Jax.pdf>

Kline, M. (2016). Freedom Home Academy International - Chicago, IL. Retrieved April 10, 2016, from <http://www.fhaintl.org/about.html>

McLeod, S. (2013). Erik Erikson. Retrieved March, 2016, from <http://www.simplypsychology.org/Erik-Erikson.html>

Our Approach. (n.d.). Retrieved February, 2016, from <https://www.cityyear.org/what-we-do/our-approach>

*Parcels to Places* [PDF]. (n.d.). Columbus: The Ohio Capital Corporation for Housing (OCCH) and the City of Columbus Land Redevelopment Office.

Pool, D. (1982). *Eritrea, Africa's longest war*. London: Anti-Slavery Society.

Ravish, J. (2013, May 27). Columbus Artist Explains How Poindexter Village Influenced Her. Retrieved April, 2016, from <http://www.10tv.com/content/stories/2013/05/27/columbus-artist-explains-how-poindexter-village-influenced-her.html>

Segal, C. (2014, October 7). Teachers expect less from black and Hispanic students, study shows. Retrieved April, 2016, from <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/teachers-expect-less-students-color-study-shows/>

Smith, T., Dr., & Lentz, E. (2014, December/January). *African-American Settlements and Communities in Columbus, Ohio* [PDF]. Columbus: Columbus Landmarks Foundation Press.  
Report

Sullivan, L., & Caruso, D. (2014, November 26). Mayor Coleman announces he won't run next year [Editorial]. *The Columbus Dispatch*. Retrieved from Mayor Coleman announces he won't run next year

## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORIC NEAR EAST SIDE

Slavery in America. (2009, January 1). Retrieved from <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/slavery>

Aminah Robinson was powerful advocate for Columbus [Editorial]. (n.d.). *The Columbus*

*Dispatch*. Retrieved from

<http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/local/2015/05/23/aminah-robinson-obit.html>

The Harlem Renaissance. (2009, January 1). Retrieved from

<http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/harlem-renaissance>

History Place - Great Speeches Collection: Frederick Douglass Speech - The Hypocrisy of

American Slavery. (n.d.). Retrieved February, 2016, from

<http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/douglass.htm>

The King Arts Complex. (2012). Retrieved April, 2016, from <http://kingartscomplex.com/about-us/>

Vitale, R. (2009, October 12). King-Lincoln leaders want to restore the neighborhood's historic 'Bronzeville' name.

Winn, A. R. (2012). The Remembering St. Petersburg Oral History Project: Youth

Empowerment and Heritage Preservation Through A Community Museum. *Transforming Anthropology*, 20(1), 67-78.

Zublin, F. (2015, July 10). Save Afrocentric Schools, Save History. Retrieved April, 2016, from

<http://www.ozy.com/fast-forward/save-afrocentric-schools-save-history/61156>

Columbusurbanleague - Home. (n.d.). Retrieved February, 2016, from <http://www.cul.org/>