media gangs of social resistance

Urban Adolescents Take Back Their Images and Their Streets through Media Production

by Linda Charmaraman

"The more people that has their hands on the media, the more truth that's going to be out there. Media won't have such a strong influence. It won't be in the hands of a small few. Maybe if enough youth start showing what they like, then MTV won't have such a strong influence… airing what we shoot instead of what mainstream producers or whatever they think that we like."

—Victor, Youthscapes participant

In these words, Victor,[1] an African-American senior at one of the lowest-performing high schools in California, made a strong case for young people becoming active participants in the ongoing struggle to counter negative perceptions of urban youth. Understanding that a power struggle is necessary to counterbalance media images of young people—and particularly of minority youth—Victor joined Youthscapes, a media

production apprenticeship program. Victor was frustrated that his sense of self was not solely in his own hands but also packaged and consumed by external audiences. Just as Bakhtin believed that the self is "socially and historically construed, yet creative" (quoted in Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998, p. 34), the participants of Youthscapes also imaginatively fashioned their selves using their knowledge of how historical, political, and social complexities complicated their ideas of personhood. In Victor's case, spending four years of his adolescent life devoted to exploring urban youth identity through

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the process of media production often meant confronting issues of racism, prejudice, and general public distrust—whether it was on the grounds of his school, at a local park, on the streets of his neighborhood, or at the Sundance Film Festival, where he experienced being outside his immediate community for the very first time.

Located in the San Francisco East Bay Area, Youthscapes, a year-round afterschool program, offered urban youth the opportunity to use technology to reconstruct their identities, as described by Strasburger and Wilson (2002). Youthscapes accomplished this identity construction in at least two ways: 1) by encouraging its apprentices to create media content that directly counteracted stereotypes about urban youth and 2) by creating group cohesiveness within the apprentice program, which also facilitated meaningful interactions with members of various communities. In the short term, Youthscapes helped its participants create alternative "families" in the program, which provided them with a safe haven where they could explore their identity against the backdrop of adults' generally negative images. In the long term, Youthscapes empowered urban youth of color to engage actively in reclaiming the representations of their experiences, both in the adult-controlled landscape of their media worlds and on their streets.

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Powerless and Overlooked in the Media

Even though creative self-expression is an essential right, many adults feel that teenagers are not fully entitled or responsible enough to make meaningful use of this creative freedom. In a nationwide poll of 2000 adults, 71 percent used negative words such as "rude," "irresponsible," and "wild" to describe teens (Farkas & Johnson, 1997). These findings were replicated later with a different sample of adults (Duffet, Johnson, & Farkas, 1999). Using racially diverse samples from a large urban northeastern city and several small to midsized midwestern cities, Zeldin (2002) concluded that adults from urban areas hold a more negative image of teenagers than those from smaller cities. Zeldin found this negative view to be related to a relatively weak sense of community among adults living in large cities. Giroux (1996) warned that the media culture can fuel "degrading visual depictions of youth as criminal, sexually decadent, drug crazed, and illiterate. In short, youth are viewed as a growing threat to the public order" (p. 218).

Bronfenbrenner (1989) pointed out that the perceptions of adults provide an important cultural frame of reference for adolescent development. When adults control the media, young people may very well absorb the negative perceptions adults often have of them.

In addition to perpetuating negative images, the media often keep members of minority groups relatively invisible. This invisibility, which signals an absence of social power, can perpetuate the perception held by many urban young people that they are not important members of society (Greenberg & Brand, 1994). In prime-time television programs, ethnic minorities, women, and girls are often depicted as victims or as having low social status; adolescents of these groups may thus feel alienated and invisible (Van Evra, 2004). In a nationwide poll, children of all colors believed that it was important to see images of their own race on television; children of color believed this more strongly than did white children (Children Now, 1998). Media images can present a powerful message of implicit and explicit exclusion to a watchful adolescent audience.

Several researchers have demonstrated that youth media production empowers and encourages youth to listen to and incorporate one another's viewpoints, forging a bond among youth and between youth and their communities (Buckingham & Harvey, 2001; Goodman, 2003; Niesyto, Buckingham, & Fisherkeller, 2003; Poyntz, 2006; Soep & Chávez, 2005). By harnessing the youth development tool of media production to address personal and community identity issues, youth media programs inform teens about media manipulation and about how to work toward altering negative stereotypes by taking personal and collective action.

Stepping Inside a Protected Space

Youthscapes offered free media production classes designed to tap youth voices through music and video. The video program provided youth with the opportunity to produce stories including commentary on school life and social dilemmas, resulting in radio broadcasts, public service announcements (PSAs), and videos. Youthscapes offered training in media literacy and taught participants to use professional media software to produce live action videos, still sequences, and animated creations. Youth learned how to script, shoot, and edit films; employ advanced camera, sound, and lighting

techniques; cast, rehearse, and direct actors; and use special effects, graphics, title design, and storyboarding. The classes were supported through community and foundation grants, as well as in-kind resources from a local high school. In developing scripts, the writer/director of a project teamed up with other apprentices for help with specific aspects of the project. Some apprentices were sought after because of their sound design skills. Others were good at handling actors and keeping the production running on schedule. Still others focused on the visual design components, including lighting, props, costumes, and proper camera angles. To showcase and share their work with other young people as well as the larger community, the apprentices teamed up with community partners, such as Youth Radio and local radio and television stations.

I decided to study Youthscapes because I was interested in studying how it accomplished the mission advertised in program grant documents: to promote youth development by encouraging personal transformations for "positive personal and community change." I began to "case the joint," as Dyson and Genishi (2005) put it, by "deliberately amass[ing] information about the configuration of time and space, of people, and of activity in their physical spaces" (p. 19). My role as a participant-observer reflects the idea that the social world takes on subjective meanings constructed by participants in a particular setting, so that, in order to interpret these experiences, one must on some level participate with those involved (Robson, 1993). While in the midst of taking notes or videotaping interactions, I was sometimes invited to participate actively by, for instance, giving feedback, lending a helping hand on a film shoot, or serving as a chaperone for a field trip. Toward the end of the program cycle, I conducted formal interviews lasting 30 to 45 minutes, which were videotaped, transcribed, and coded.

The nineteen students I observed in the video apprenticeship class were diverse in terms of ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic class. The majority of the youth were from African-American or Asian-American backgrounds, while the rest were Chicano, Caucasian,

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and Middle Eastern. Forty percent of the apprentices were female. The average family income was about $45,000, below the county median of $55,946. Participants came from three different schools in the East Bay, ranging from the lowest performing school in the state to moderately low-performing schools. None of them had much funding to support arts education.

Throughout my field observations, I observed technical training in media literacy and in the use of video design software, camera equipment, and sound equipment. This training typically took place indoors at a downtown office location. I also went into the field with the students as they interacted with their local community by researching and asking for permission to film in various locations, borrowing costumes and props to stay within the budget for each project, casting and directing local actors, utilizing and sharing public space with community members, and publicizing screenings to their community audiences.

The completed video works were broadcast on public television, sent to film festivals for consideration, and screened at local schools and community centers. Each video piece was branded with the Youthscapes logo, which gave the apprentices an opportunity to experience pride in their collective group identity.

Several of the program objectives paralleled those of other youth media programs (Tyner & Mokund, 2003): *youth voice* through projects conceived, produced, and edited by youth with guidance from adults; *career development* by increasing technical expertise and exposing participants to film festivals; *youth development* by providing a safe place to express ideas, give and receive constructive criticism, and explore new worlds; *media literacy* by offering the opportunity to dispel myths and stereotypes about urban youth; and *production problem solving* by managing time and resource constraints and coordinating individuals to accomplish the group's goals.

In Youthscapes, all of this added up to two broad program objectives:
• Encouraging creative media production, with the potential of counteracting negative stereotypes

- Creating a safe haven for youth self-expression so that the apprentices formed family-like alliances

Identity and Agency through Responsible Media Production

One of the primary objectives of Youthscapes was to enable personal and community change by increasing the capacity of young people to transform their individual experiences into media products. The program channeled the voice and identity of urban youth through digital storytelling, with special emphasis on storylines and themes focused on the resolution of conflict and personal growth. Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998) wrote that human agency is the power of individuals to act with purpose and reflection and to reiterate and shape the world they live in, both as social producers and as social products. Research has demonstrated ways in which youth media participants exercise agency by illustrating the personal details of their multi-layered internal and external worlds (Charmaraman, 2006; Hull & Katz, 2006). In the Youthscapes apprenticeship program, the students exercised their agency by writing and producing multiple forms of media.

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Topics That Matter

One form of media Youthscapes participants produced was public service announcements (PSAs) that explored themes relevant to their personal experiences as adolescents, such as campaigns to encourage safe sex or discourage domestic violence or smoking. The young people also explored their racial and ethnic identities by developing PSAs concerning anti-violence in African-American communities, Latino health awareness, and Asian attitudes about voting.

One PSA tackled racial profiling by the media. In this PSA, a news crew chases an African-American teenager through the streets of Oakland. He tries to lose them, hopping over a wire fence. He finally confronts them and demands to know why they are chasing him. A female reporter asks, "Excuse me, sir, did you just…*vote*?!?" The man confirms that he did vote, as is his right. The reporters then barrage the man with questions about this "unusual" act. As the man leaves the bewildered crew, shaking his head, they spot another voter and charge after their next "victim." The piece ends with a voiceover: "If you can, you should." This PSA does double duty: It encourages youth to vote and dispels media stereotypes about why a young urban black male might be fleeing from media authority figures.

The students were encouraged to write not only reality-based pieces such as PSAs and documentaries, but also fictional narratives. The fictional works focused on controversial topics, such as suicide, intelligence, and Western imperialism. Patricia, a Chinese-American high school senior, set her fictional piece in her own school. The seven-minute piece starts with a definition of the word *inertia*. The camera pans to images of an urban public school. We overhear students muttering, "This is so stupid. I'm so bored!" The rest of the film is mainly nonverbal, a choreographed dance of gestures between the droning white male math teacher and his classroom of multicultural students, who initially sit slumped over their desks with their eyes down. All of a sudden, one female student stands up to the teacher, challenging his rigid rules. Other students, through heartfelt dance movements, stand up for their right to be heard. The teacher's eyes grow wider, as if he fears losing control of his classroom, but then the students' energy becomes infectious. Eventually he joins the dancing, learning the students' unique styles of expression. Then the students willingly return to their desks, the teacher picks up the textbook with more animation, and the students start raising their hands to ask questions. As the video ends, the camera moves out of the classroom to show the "Quiet" sign falling off the door. Attempting to break stereotypes of disinterested urban learners of color and their jaded teachers, Patricia created an alternate world in which a confrontation between an adult teacher and his students has a rejuvenating effect.

In another piece that tackled stereotyping, Kristine, a Chinese-American high school junior, used both spoken-word and visual elements to critique a superficial world that makes assumptions about who people are based on how they look. The four-minute piece begins with an Asian-American teenage boy sitting next to an Asian-American teenage girl at a bus stop. At first the young man tries to act cool, though it is obvious that he is trying to get the girl's attention through

furtive, sideways glances. A poem written by a local award-winning spoken-word artist is threaded as a voiceover, capturing the young man's hopes and fears as he awkwardly attempts to impress the girl. As the guy blurts out flirtatious lines, the girl is noticeably uncomfortable and gives him dirty looks. In a last-ditch effort, he asks, "What is your ethnic make-up?" She glares and begins to "school" the guy about issues of gender and race. Ethnic make-up, she explains, is a colonizing concept that her sisters of color have to put up with. In a flow of spoken word and illustrative visuals that keep to lightning fast rhythms, the young woman complains about the female struggle to attain an unnatural ideal of beauty. As she tells the boy that this ideal "isn't real to begin with," we are shown images of her changing shirts over and over again in front of a mirror and flipping through beauty magazines. She says—to images of her family album—that she knows where her indigenous roots are. She admits that, in the past, her traditional culture kept her lips shut (we see an image of an elderly Chinese man sitting at a restaurant), but now she has found the freedom to vocalize (we see images of her ability to go anywhere). As the heart-racing piece comes to a climax, the spoken word reveals her ethnic make-up: "I don't have any, because your ethnicity isn't something that you just make up. As far as that shit that my sisters put on their faces, that's not make-up, it's make *believe*."

Developing these kinds of story lines was empowering for the young people. Their unique depictions of the world, whether autobiographical or imaginary, were given a community audience. At the final showcase screenings, audiences saw a recurrent pattern in which urban youth explored their identities and broke down stereotypes so that their often-overlooked perspectives might be better understood.

Audience and Agency to Communicate Authenticity

Youthscapes productions were publicly screened at schools, community centers, and film festivals, with friends, classmates, and family members typically attending the screenings. However, some screenings took place in less familiar settings. At one screening, which took place at an academic conference, Hank, an African-American high school senior, and Heather, a senior of mixed Japanese and European ancestry, spoke before a daunting audience of researchers, teachers, and youth media organizers from around the country. When an audience member asked the young panelists why they felt the need to air their perspectives, Hank remarked, "I never agreed with what was on TV. It would be a different world if every kid could afford [professional digital video equipment]. You can be creative with pen and paper, but if we could access this equipment we'd have … more to work with. Kids can do so much with music and movies."

Hank was recommending the power of individual youth agency—that young people be not only consumers but also producers of media. Instead of treating the apprentices as convenient sources of labor for adult-initiated media projects, as Fleetwood (2005) cautions, Youthscapes gave apprentices the "aesthetic safety zone" (Jocson, 2006; McCormick, 2000) to write in their own voice, a voice that was not filtered through explicit institutional or societal restrictions. During her year-end interview, Lynn, a Chinese-American senior, believed that she had had very little opportunity to voice her concerns about the world and be taken seriously until she joined the program:

> I love working here because I've always felt that there is a weird relationship between youth and adults at times.… Young people feel as though adults don't really understand.… They do understand me here, but in general I feel that sometimes adults don't give young people a chance to speak, and I think that's what this program allows: youth literacy or being able to communicate our ideas effectively through film.

Creative Alliances, Alternative Families

Afterschool youth programs often serve to ease a community's concern about unmotivated teenagers wandering about the neighborhood and causing mischief (Chung, 2000). Programs can also be designed as physical barriers, separating the responsible local residents from the neighborhood teenagers who have yet to gain the trust of the community to be left on their own. The boundaries erected to "protect" the commu-

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nity, however, simultaneously fence off the young people, preventing them from actively engaging with their own communities.

In contrast, within the last decade, a trend toward assets-based approaches to promoting resilience has come to regard youth as resources to be developed rather than problems to be fixed (Heath & McLaughlin, 1993; Lerner & Benson, 2003). Heath (1991) said that successful community-based organizations promote shared responsibility and family pride among the youth participants. McLaughlin (2000) summarized ten years of research on 120 youth-based organizations by saying that adults not only can provide guidance on social etiquette within and beyond the program, but can also give youth meaningful roles in the organization. Participants then learn "trust, responsibility, and personal accountability. They learn that their actions and their inactions matter. They acquire a critical sense of agency and realism. They learn that they can make important contributions to their group and to their community" (McLaughlin, 2000, p. 14).

In keeping with these beliefs, the second Youthscapes objective was to enhance group cohesiveness and identity within and beyond the program's walls. A sense of group identity and responsibility enabled Youthscapes apprentices to positively represent their individual and collective identities to their communities. Program coordinators not only focused on the "hard" technical skills needed to create media projects but also incorporated "soft" skills, such as responsibility to the group, patience while completing a project over the course of many months, and getting past roadblocks. More experienced team players were encouraged to guide newer apprentices through the various stages of planning, producing, and showcasing their works.

Apprentices developed a sense of belonging to a family-like network, which empowered them to thrive as productive young people engaged with socially sanctioned goals, acquiring career-related skills rather than merely "playing" with media. During formal instructional time four afternoons a week, the program emphasized that each team member had a commitment to contribute to each project, and that each member was a valuable asset to each apprentice director's production.

Apprentices developed trust and group pride by giving and receiving constructive criticism. They developed group ownership by giving credit to each person for his or her contribution. Whenever a video was about to be unveiled to the public, a private screening party gave apprentices the opportunity both to enjoy their accomplishment and to make last-minute edits before receiving the ultimate feedback from the community audience. Group projects, both within and outside the program walls, gave apprentices opportunities to learn that, as McLaughlin (2000) suggested, their actions (such as their video creations and their behavior when out in the community) and their inactions (such as their refusal to perpetuate stereotypes or cause mischief on the streets) truly did matter.

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Negotiating Private Spaces in Public Places

Since most of the preparatory phases of media production—writing, casting, and rehearsing—took place within the program's walls, one of the most daunting tasks was to venture outside to find appropriate locations in which to shoot the scenes. Some of the apprentices stuck to the familiar, using their own backyards and bedrooms as backdrops for their stories. Others went beyond their small circle and crossed boundaries of public space sanctioned for adolescent use, shooting in abandoned warehouses, parks, public transit escalators, sidewalks, football fields, public bathrooms, restaurants, and even their own high school classrooms. Instructors explained the legality and possible risks of using various locations.

Unfortunately, there were not many public spaces that were truly public enough for teenagers to gather without inspiring some degree of wariness on the part of adults. On one film shoot, at a park playground in Oakland, local families seemed to withhold full access to "their" territory when the young teens of color invaded with their cameras and equipment. Victor, the African-American senior quoted at the beginning of this article, was helping the camera person by clearing a walkway up the stairs of a slide. At the top of the stairs, an older white man was unwilling to move. The man told Victor, "We're not going to just give you guys the park," as if the apprentices had invaded the sanctity of

the playground experience. Victor politely said that they were just "borrowing" this section of the park for a few minutes. The father said, dismissively, that he would continue to play with his child as usual and that the crew could go elsewhere. After the incident, Victor told the other apprentices that he suspected the father wanted an altercation, but Victor was all too aware of how his behavior as an African-American teenager might be seen by the watchful audience of park-goers: "I didn't want him to be, like, 'Don't hang around black people. You see what that black kid did?'"

Did the stubborn father see Victor as a teenager—or as a *black* teenager? Simply by congregating in public spaces and differentiating themselves through fashion, gesture, and verbal expressions, teenagers of all colors attract attention, cause irritation, and generate uneasiness among adults (Hall, Coffey, & Williamson, 1999; Lieberg, 1995). Four years in Youthscapes had prepared Victor to react in a manner that disproved the expectations of the white adult. In keeping with Youthscapes' goal of increasing engagement between youth and their communities, Victor chose to remain civil. He saw the consequences of his actions not only for himself but also for the production group as well as the larger community of African-American urban youth. Through the guidance provided by Youthscapes on how to deal with interpersonal obstacles and juggle multiple roles for the sake of the project, the apprentices were particularly aware of the images they projected, both on screen and in person.

The tension between urban youth of color and white adults became more salient when the apprentices joined a youth media contingent from across the country at the Sundance Film Festival in Utah. Most of the Youthscapes participants had never been outside the Bay Area. With me as one of the chaperones, they traveled to a town that caters to white recreational skiers and snowboarders. Conscious of an invisible divide, the apprentices periodically uttered phrases to the effect of, "We are the only people of color in this town!" Even at a lunch gathering of youth groups from across the country, the Youthscapes apprentices noticed with disappointment that they were the only non-white participants, which made them feel homesick for the diversity of the Bay Area. At screenings and parties, the apprentices preferred to hang out with one another in groups

at the back of the event, rather than pushing through crowds of people who behaved as if the apprentices were invisible. To document the bewildering adventure of being away from home, the apprentices decided to turn their "outsider" experiences at Sundance into a documentary. While toting around cameras and boom microphones, the apprentices at times encountered disapproving stares from the public. This experience mirrored Goodman's (2003) description of reactions to other youth media groups filming on the streets:

> …average citizens, especially youth of color, are not expected to use professional-quality equipment and to be engaged in the more serious business of gathering news and producing documentaries. This is still considered to be the sole province of mainstream media institutions.… It is a shift in power relations for traditionally marginalized teenagers. (pp. 52–53)

The apprentices gravitated toward the younger, more innovative pieces being shown at the festival and wanted to interview cast members after screenings. Unfortunately, some producers instructed their cast to refuse the interviews. Perhaps they were worried about the depictions these exuberant urban youth might broadcast. Despite the many raised eyebrows of those around them, the apprentices maintained the group solidarity that Youthscapes encouraged. They found strength in numbers. If an apprentice was questioned by an authority figure or was hesitant to approach someone for an interview, a fellow apprentice would be right there to provide encouragement and a sense of legitimate group identity.

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In producing their documentary about the Sundance trip, the apprentices challenged adult assumptions about who gets to inform the public through media. Though the apprentices did include some evidence of their feelings of displacement in Utah's homogenous environment—shots at the airport set against a description of landing in "Mormon Disneyland," or an image of a storefront named "Elegant Asia," which highlights the exotification of the Far East—the main storyline focused on their collective excitement over the many "firsts" they experienced: playing in the snow together, spotting celebrities, learning from an

industry buyer about what makes a good film, pursuing careers that are opening to them because of the skills they have honed in the program. Throughout the film, they highlighted their feelings of tremendous privilege for having raised enough money to attend in the first place. Instead of focusing on the negative aspect of feeling like "second-class citizens," the Youthscapes apprentices chose to celebrate their time together and to showcase the sense of limitless potential gained from creating positive images on a shoestring budget—images that could ultimately be displayed at a venue as prestigious as the Sundance Film Festival.

Breaking Down Barriers

When they filmed in public locations or went on field trips, the Youthscapes apprentices encountered reactions similar to Conquergood's (1992) depictions of public discourse about gangs, which evokes "middle class fears and anxieties about social disorder, disintegration, and chaos, that are made palpable in these demonized figures of inscrutable, unproductive, predatory, pathological, alien Others lurking in urban shadows and margins, outside the moral community of decent people" (p. 4). When the multi-ethnic apprentices *trespassed* onto the middle class, family-oriented playground, the father who confronted Victor maintained the imaginary boundary between the suburbs and the inner city with his body language and tone of speech. The apprentice crew gathered around to support Victor in a way that recalls the heightened group solidarity of a gang that ventures outside of its "hood" to face a hostile external world (Conquergood, 1994).

When asked during his year-end interview what he valued most about the program, Pedro, a Filipino-American, said he was grateful that he had found a "sense of solidarity" with like-minded and "motivated" people to fill his emotional void, so that he felt less alienated. Similarly, Victor said, referring to the other Youthscapes participants:

> It's more than just a program… it's a family. It's not like public schools where instructors tell you what to do and how to do it…. They really get to know you. They really know about your strengths. They want to know about your life, what you are interested in… I found most of my tutors are like my big sisters... Big brothers and big sisters. That's how I look at them.

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At the media conference where Heather and Hank sat on a panel, the audience asked questions about what it meant to them to make videos and show them to others. Heather shared that, when she and Hank were working together, she felt a "great sense of family. We are making films because we enjoy it. Whether they are seen or not, the fact that we get to do it together is something I'll take with me for the rest of my life." Heather's public testimony to the power of collective agency reminds us that collaborative exercises can empower not only individuals but also groups.

Youthscapes enabled the apprentices to form alliances that helped them combat preconceived notions about their identities. Vigil (1993) pointed out that gangs "fill socialization voids and offer attachments, commitments, involvements, and beliefs for young people in need of affiliation and achievement" (p. 94). The apprentices formed a gang-like alternative family against an outside adult world that often seemed hostile or indifferent to their needs. Having established a group identity as young urban media activists, the apprentices were equipped to stand up for themselves as producers with a legitimate voice in the predominantly white male world of the media. They had to step beyond the refuge of their program walls to produce their videos, connecting with adults, both within and outside of their local communities, who might otherwise have overlooked their perspectives.

Implications of Identity Production through Media

Challenging the premise that adolescents—particularly adolescents of color—are aimless and irresponsible, Youthscapes participants made a positive mark on public territory. They used the powerful tools of the media to counteract negative images of urban youth, and they demonstrated their sense of group and personal responsibility, agency, and identity during face-to-face encounters with members of the varied communities they encountered when they stepped outside the walls of the program.

Youth-centered community-based media programs can help adolescents combat misrepresentation in the media and alienation from society. Such programs can develop mentoring systems that promote resiliency and agency to combat negative images prevalent in adult-

controlled media. Freire (1970) pointed out that learners can act as producers and constructers of knowledge rather than simply being acted upon. Students with the technological capabilities to write, perform, and edit video productions can tell their stories in the precise ways in which they want them told. Thus, Youthscapes was not just a way to get young people off the streets. These urban youth were empowered to *re*-present their images, their reputations, their passions, and their ideals, both in public screenings of their work and in face-to-face encounters with community members.

As in other community-based video production programs (Fleetwood, 2005), Youthscapes participants were active agents in breaking down barriers between themselves and their own community. Their alternative families in the program fostered independence and freedom of expression, as well as social interdependence. The apprentices developed a media "gang code" of technical and aesthetic work ethics, in which individuals pushed highly collaborative projects forward despite obstacles placed by outsiders who might not understand or respect their mission. Learning how to interact with prejudiced or dominating adults may have provided the apprentices with greater resilience in tackling future obstacles. Youthscapes empowered urban young people of color by encouraging their voices and fostering positive civic dispositions including tolerance and respect for others, social responsibility, efficacy, and connection to the community.

The example of Youthscapes has practical implications for youth workers and for their professional development, as well as for the wider community and policymakers. Professional development of youth media workers might emphasize developing youth agency to use the power of media to *re*-present urban youth, particularly those who are most often negatively stereotyped: girls; youth of color; gay, lesbian, and transgender youth; and young people with disabilities. Youth would need to be equipped not only with the technical tools of media making but also with the skills needed to distribute their messages to their communities and beyond. Easily accessible youth media products could offer policymakers, community-based organizers, teachers, and administrators a greater sense of connection with the concerns of urban

young people, which could lead to increased dialogue regarding youth policies within and beyond the classroom. Then, perhaps, the public would not be as easily persuaded by political campaigns that routinely capitalize on the vision of "irresponsible" teenagers as a public health threat (Males, 1996). Reaching out to public television stations, pitching youth-centered ideas to network producers, and disseminating copies of local youth works to similar community-based youth organizations can further showcase adolescent voices and demonstrate their value to the local community and even to global mainstream media channels.

> The apprentices developed a media "gang code" of technical and aesthetic work ethics, in which individuals pushed highly collaborative projects forward despite obstacles placed by outsiders who might not understand or respect their mission.

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Notes

[1] All names of participants and the name "Youthscapes" are pseudonyms.