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AID TO CHILDREN OF IMPRISONED MOTHERS: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

Brief Overview

In recent years scholars, authors, and activists have articulated the existence of a generation gap within the African-American community. This generation gap exists between those individuals who were adults and/or "came of age" during the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements of the 1950s, 1960s, and through the mid-1970s, with those of the Hip Hop Generation: Black and Latino youth born after 1965. The terrain of the conflict is primarily over intra-group challenges of politics and culture.

In the context of the developing generational divide in contemporary African-American social life, this study examines the not-for-profit organization, Aid to Children of Imprisoned Mothers (AIM), and its successes and challenges in transitioning youth to leadership. I examine AIM's organizational culture and its ability to transition youth -- its staff, volunteers and clients -- into leadership in partnership with the adult leadership of the organization. The mission of AIM is, "To inspire hope and empower children of incarcerated mothers through programs and services that lessen the impact of the mother's incarceration." Implicit in this mission is the development of leadership and decision-making skills of the participants in the program as essential to breaking the cycle of poverty and incarceration in the families and communities of the participating individuals. While the generation gap within the African-American community is one specific issue in the contemporary social context in which AIM operates, other issues such as negative social forces that reinforce a cycle of incarceration and poverty, as well as the educational and socio-economic gap between service providers and clients, also challenge its goal of meeting its mission. Children of incarcerated parents generally live in environments where substance abuse and criminal activity are common. With an incarcerated parent, the family unit is weakened in its ability to shield the child from factors that negatively the child's social development. AIM attempts to provide guidance and social support for the participants in its program to break the cycle of incarceration in the family and the community.

One effort in breaking the cycle of incarceration and achieving youth development is AIM's Teen Leadership Program (TLP). The function of TLP is to develop the leadership and decision-making skills necessary to empower program participants to challenge the negative factors in their environment while becoming positive agents of change within their households and community. TLP emphasizes academic and leadership skills and provides a mechanism for participants to gain decision-making and organizing experience through community service projects and other activities.

The goal of providing leadership development for youth is also directed at staff and volunteers. The staff is composed of young professionals in their twenties. AIM volunteers are primarily undergraduate students from their late teens to early twenties. This study will also explore the training and development of young staff members and volunteers as leaders in the community and social service professions, and as socially conscious and active citizens.

My observations of AIM are that it has minimized the generational conflict in its programs and routine operations. AIM exists as an intergenerational community. The primary founders of the AIM project are products of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement generations, while much of its staff and participants in its Teen Leadership Program are members of the Hip Hop generation. Particularly since its work is centered in the African-American community of metropolitan Atlanta, the project explores AIM's ability to bridge the generation gap in contemporary African-American political and cultural life, and overcome educational and social barriers to accomplish its stated mission.

Methodology

In my initial plan, interviews with AIM clients were the heart of the research design of this ethnographic study. AIM Executive Director Sandra Barnhill and I felt that my participation in Camp AIM High and the Teen Leadership Program would allow me to develop a relationship with the clients sufficient enough to conduct interviews with the clients. While AIM administration, staff, and I agreed that the clients were comfortable with me as a participant in the program, the initial interviews with clients did not yield the expected result. Most of the client interviewees did not seem forthcoming in one-on-one interviews.

Another obstacle presented by client interviews was the issue of consent. Since the clients were minors, it was required to get consent from their guardians for them to be interviewed. AIM staff sent consent forms to client caregivers, but the majority of forms were not signed and returned. Given that clients were more comfortable with me as a contributor to program activities, as opposed to an interviewer, and the difficulty of obtaining consent from the caregiver households, I decided a direct participant-observer approach would be the best to conduct the ethnography.
With the assessment by Barnhill and AIM staff that clients who participated in the camp did accept me, I proceeded with observation as a member of the community. Through AIM activities and informal conversations, clients allowed me to observe them and

participate in their normal activities. From late August 2005 until February 2006, I observed ten TLP sessions, including the staff/volunteer evaluations that occur after each session. Besides the routine TLP sessions, I participated in Camp AIM High and in the "Back to School" program for TLP members. Besides participating in and observing TLP activities, I led focus groups with the clients, which was presented to them as an AIM activity during the TLP after school program. I conducted two focus groups of five clients each. All but one young man were eager to participate. After the rest of his group enthusiastically participated, he decided to join in. Finally, I also conducted interviews with four clients.

In addition to collecting data from clients, I also collected data from staff and volunteers. I attended an AIM staff meeting and participated in one staff development session. An assistant also facilitated a focus group comprised of AIM volunteers, and I conducted formal interviews with AIM Executive Director Sandra Barnhill (two sessions), two AIM staff members, and one volunteer.

The AIM staff, volunteers, and clients in all of the TLP activities were African-American. Three of the four staff members who worked with TLP were male. In the fall of 2005 and the spring of 2006, there were generally five volunteers (four female and one male) per session at the TLP after school program. During the same period eighteen clients participated in TLP. AIM's TLP members consisted of 12 males and six females. At Camp AIM High, there were approximately 52 campers, numbers split evenly between males and females. All campers were African-American, with the exception of two Latino children. The staff of Camp AIM High was composed of 20 people, predominantly African-American (with two white women staffers) and evenly split between men and women (10 each).

To enhance the field work at AIM and to help me observe AIM organizational culture in the context of the youth development, I also engaged in a review of the literature on the African-American generational divide. Further, I engaged in dialogues with activists from the Hip Hop generation to develop an understanding of the challenges and issues from their perspective. Being an African-American man born in 1954, coming of age during the Black Power movement of the 1960s, and with training as a researcher, I needed to explore the perspectives of activists from the Hip Hop generation. I selected Sista II Sista in Brooklyn, New York; Katrina on the Ground; and the Young People's Project in Jackson, Mississippi. My goal was to study and have dialogue with these activists to crystallize an understanding of youth leadership development in the Hip Hop generation and the challenges they face with Civil Rights / Black Power movement generation leadership. From my dialogues with youth activists, one common theme emerged. I learned that members of the Hip Hop generation want technical support, resources, and advice from their elders, but desire the flexibility to take initiative and to explore their own ideas ideologically and programmatically.

The Black Generation Gap: A Brief Review

In recent years, writers, activists and cultural critics have identified the development of a generation gap in the African-American community between the Civil Rights/ Black

Power movement generations and the Hip Hop generation. The generation gap centers around two related questions: 1) whether the Hip Hop generation is continuing the political legacy of its parents, and 2) whether contemporary leaders of the Civil Rights and Black Power generation are relevant to the issues facing African-Americans today (Boyd, 2003; Foreman, 2003; Hurd, 2004; Kilson, 2003).

Comparing today's youth with the activism and service of their own young adulthood, the Civil Rights and Black Power generations often perceive the Hip Hop generation as being apolitical and self-absorbed. Some elder scholars and activists from the Civil Rights generation question the Hip Hop generation's respect for previous generations' contributions and sacrifices. Harvard professor Martin Kilson criticizes intellectuals of the post-civil rights generation of "tossing poison darts at African-Americans' mainline civil rights traditions and its courageous leadership figures," (in particular Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr.). Much of Kilson's critique centers on the humor – at King's and Parks's expense – in the movie *Barbershop*. Kilson argues "…the 'hip hop worldview' is nothing other than an updated face on the old-hat, crude, anti-humanistic values of hedonism and materialism" (Kilson, 2003). Kilson's charge of rampant "hedonism and materialism" is echoed by others of his generation who see a "corrosive cultural force" in the popular culture of the Hip Hop generation that "propagated negative values" and is "a causal factor in incidents of real aggression, illegal activities, and expressions of moral depravity"(Forman, 2002).

While not as critical as Kilson, NAACP leader and scholar Julian Bond sees differences in the activism of his generation (Bond was a member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in the early 1960s) and young African-Americans. Bond states "the major difference I see between people my age group and people in that age group…is that when we were young, we organized. I don't know what this group is doing" (Bond quoted in Hurd, 2004, 1).

Hip Hop oriented scholars and activists offer cogent responses to critics like Kilson and Bond. Hip Hop historian Jeff Chang retorts that the Hip Hop generation is at least as active, if not more so, than the Civil Rights generation. In his book *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip Hop Generation*, Chang cites a 2001 UCLA Freshman survey that indicated "that nearly half of freshman said they participated in an organized demonstration" (Chang, 2005, 454).

Furthermore, Hip Hop oriented activists and scholars see the failure of the Civil Rights and Black Power generations to embrace African-American youth and provide effective leadership for them. Some argue that a dominant theme of Hip Hop culture and consciousness is to give voice to African-American youth that have been abandoned by their elders. According to Hip Hop journalist and activist Davy D, "hip hop continues to be a direct response to an older generation's rejection of the values and needs of young people" (Davy D quoted in Hurd, 2004). University of Southern California Cinema professor Todd Boyd (2002) contrasts the moralism of the Civil Rights movement with the abrasiveness and "in your face" character of Hip Hop. Boyd argues that in

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contemporary politics and culture the Civil Rights Movement has lost its relevance and that Hip Hop culture is the dominant cultural vehicle in African-American life.

Other scholarship focuses more attention on identifying the nature and roots of the generational conflict. Based on data collected from door-to-door inquiries in Northern California, Civil Rights generation activist and Black Studies Professor (at San Francisco State) Oba T'Shaka asserts the generational divide is the most critical issue in the African-American community. T'Shaka (2004) believes the generation gap is caused by a series of "powerful hostile forces" that assaulted African-American culture and families in the late 1960s, during the genesis of the Hip Hop generation. He states:

> The generation gap…is more than an age gap. The generation gap in African American communities is a post nineteen sixty-eight problem that grows out of powerful, hostile forces that attacked the Black community. These forces have created a gulf between older and younger Blacks that threatens the future of Black youth, while also endangering cultural transmissions and cultural continuity in the African American community. (ix)

The hostile forces identified by T'Shaka include: 1) urban removal that disrupts Black neighborhoods; 2) destabilizing effects of drugs in the Black community; 3) governmental repression of Black leadership; 4) public policies based on a view that the Black family is pathological; 5) promotion of Black leaders that are not connected to the Black freedom movement; 6) the rise of the prison-industrial complex; 7) and the expansion and collapse of the welfare system.

Bakari Kitwana's *The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African-American Culture* is commonly considered a seminal work in terms of defining the political realities of Black youth. Kitwana argues that unique challenges face African-Americans born after the end of *de jure* segregation. African-American youth do not face the overt racism and government-sanctioned discrimination their ancestors and elders faced. In spite of the progress in civil rights in American society, Kitwana argues young Blacks still are victims of institutionalized racism, including increasing incarceration rates, continued racial profiling, and unemployment. Consistent with Kitwana's argument was the national epidemic of crack cocaine use in the early 1980s, particularly in African-American and Latino communities. The proliferation of crack cocaine not only produced public health consequences but expanded the involvement of youth in the underground economy and sparked repressive legislation and policing practices in poor communities.

Some scholars believe the gap is over-emphasized. In his article titled "From Civil Rights to Hip Hop towards a Nexus of Ideas," University of Georgia Education professor Derrick Aldridge argues there is continuity between the political activism and consciousness of the Hip Hop generation with its predecessors. Aldridge argues that four common themes link the activism of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement with its descendants in the Hip Hop generation. The themes include 1) self-determination; 2) liberatory education and pedagogy; 3) economic solidarity; and 4) a Pan-African connection.

While there is debate over the causes, nature, and extent of the generational divide in the African-American community, its existence cannot be denied. Given the growing debate in the intellectual and activist communities, the study of AIM's ability to transition youth into leaders must consider this issue. AIM's administration, staff, volunteers, and clients, while not exclusively, are predominantly African-American. The program also relies upon African-American cultural themes in its work to its clients. This study will explore AIM's ability to develop young African-American leaders in the context of the contemporary Black community's generational divide.

AIM: A Brief Background

AIM began operations in 1987 under the name Aid to Imprisoned Mothers. For its first two years of operation Sandra Barnhill was the only staff person. AIM's focus was on supporting the households of incarcerated mothers. The primary and initial AIM project was its prison visitation program, in which the organization transported family members to visit incarcerated women. Recognizing the needs of the children of incarcerated mothers, AIM initiated Camp AIM High in 1990. Camp AIM High is a summer camp in rural Georgia that gives AIM's youth clients – predominately inner-city youth – an opportunity to have a wilderness experience as well as a concentrated dose of inspiration and critical thinking, learning, and recreational activities.

In 1994, the AIM changed its name to Aid to Children of Imprisoned Mothers. The change of the organization's name was based on the emphasis on serving the children of incarcerated mothers. With the initiation of numerous programs throughout the United States to serve "at risk" youth, the leadership of AIM was convinced that the children of prisoners needed special programming. This decision secured the intergenerational nature of AIM. In 1997, AIM initiated its after-school program for the clients of the program. AIM's primary clients were children of incarcerated mothers, ages five to eighteen. The organization later established the Teen Leadership Program for teens from thirteen to eighteen. The after-school program is the primary day-to-day program that serves clients and provides them with academic support and social development.

AIM as an Intergenerational Community

As previously stated, the AIM community includes key participants from Civil Rights and Black Power generations and the Hip Hop generation. The different elements complement each other and the younger members of the community have spaces to assert their leadership within the context of the general vision, mission, and program of the community. I will describe the various generational groups of AIM and the role they play in the organization.

Situating AIM Leadership

The founding leadership, chief administrator, and board of AIM are members of the Civil Rights and Black Power generations. This is the group that established the basic

philosophy, orientation, and policies of AIM. The vision and mission of AIM reflect the legacy of the social justice goals of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements.

AIM's principal founder and executive director, attorney Sandra Barnhill, is the conceptual architect and inspirational facilitator of the AIM community. In 1987, 28-year-old Barnhill started AIM. The primary focus of AIM at that time was to serve incarcerated female parents. Born in 1959, during the Civil Rights Movement, Barnhill's further developed her political and social consciousness in the context of the Black movements of 1960s and 70s. She was greatly influenced by her father, an activist in the United States Army during the Vietnam War era. While an undergraduate in Atlanta (at Agnes Scott College and Georgia State University), she became involved in social change advocacy. Negative experiences with patriarchal bureaucracies made her a critic of hierarchy and a proponent of action-oriented work. Given her experiences, Barnhill created AIM as a space to allow clients and staff to actualize their potential and express their voices in the context of the organization's programs. In 1994, Barnhill and AIM leadership shifted the focus of the organization to the children of incarcerated mothers (Sandra Barnhill, personal communication, August 30, 2005).

Two other founders with roots in the Civil Rights and Black Power generations who played significant roles in the philosophy, vision, mission and orientation of AIM are Paula Dressel and Dola Young. Dressel, an activist scholar and non-profit executive, was actually one of Barnhill's former college professors. Within the AIM community, Dressel promotes socially conscious and responsible policies and relationships. Young, also an attorney, emphasizes that AIM programming be culturally-centered, particularly reflecting awareness and pride in the African diaspora and African-American history and culture (Sandra Barnhill, personal communication, August 30, 2005).

Situating AIM Staff and Volunteers

AIM staff and volunteers are principally from the Hip Hop generation (1). The primary AIM personnel responsible for the Teen Leadership Program are James Francois, the Senior Program Coordinator, and Cornelius Lloyd, Program Coordinator (2). Francois, 27, is a graduate of Northeastern University with a Bachelors degree in Sociology. Lloyd, 22, a former AIM volunteer, is a graduate of Georgia State University and also holds a Bachelors degree in Sociology. Both Francois and Lloyd desire careers in community service or education, perhaps as executives in non-profits serving young people (James Francois, personal communication, September 28, 2005; Cornelius Lloyd, personal communication, September 28, 2005). Barnhill sees the professional development of her staff as one of her primary responsibilities as executive director. One method that the organization employs is the Self-Directed Work Team (SWDT) approach. The executive director is responsible for conveying to staff the philosophy, vision, and central principles of AIM. AIM staff is empowered to develop programs while the executive director gives

1. For the purposes of this study, the Executive Director (Sandra Barnhill) is considered part of AIM administration to distinguish her from AIM staff.

2. James Francois resigned his position at AIM in February of 2006.

advice and critique as support to their development (Sandra Barnhill, personal communication, September 28, 2005).

AIM volunteers are also principally members of the Hip Hop generation. The Atlanta campuses of Spelman College and Georgia State University (GSU) serve as primary recruiting grounds for AIM volunteers. AIM volunteers are involved in direct services and contact with AIM clients. They receive training in the philosophy, mission, and program of the organization, as well as an orientation to the social reality of households of children with incarcerated mothers. Volunteers are also instructed in the ethics and policies of AIM. The organization values its volunteers' perspectives by inviting them to give oral and written feedback after each program in which they participate. Volunteers have often been hired as AIM staff, and even after leaving college some maintain relationships with the organization. In this way, AIM provides leadership training for college students aspiring to employment in community service and has generally served to instill a sense of social responsibility in graduates of Spelman and GSU, in particular.

Situating AIM Clients

AIM clients, the children of imprisoned women, are members of the Hip Hop generation. While they were born in the post-segregation period, they do not totally fit into the worldview and consciousness articulated by Kitwana in his book on the politics and issues of the Hip Hop generation. Kitwana specifically identifies African-American youth as people born from 1965 to 1984. Significant shifts in popular culture, in particular Hip Hop culture, occurred after the early 1990's. Particularly with the subordination of political messages by the corporate music industry, popular Hip Hop culture after the early 1990s tends to be less socially conscious, more commercial, with a greater emphasis on materialism, pornography, and violence. Ethnomusicologist Cheryl Keyes (2004) argues that 1980s Hip Hop music was saturated with social and political themes called "nation conscious music" by some Hip Hop scholars. Keyes states that there was a shift from "nation conscious music" to themes that "glorify a gangsta image, utilize gendered expletives (e.g. 'bitches and hoes'), and exploit drug lore, violence, and sexual promiscuity on and off the stage," and promote the commercialization of the art form by the music industry (p. 158-9). In addition to the shifts in popular culture, the African-American community experienced increased levels of incarceration, devastating effects of a growing global economy (e.g., loss of manufacturing jobs), and social isolation of poor Black communities.

Current AIM clients, particularly participants in TLP, are coming of age in a social reality not only significantly different from that of their parents and grand-parents, but that of older youth in the African-American community. The children of imprisoned mothers generally live in communities that are poor, have limited access to employment and health care, and are disproportionately involved in substance abuse and illegal activity. For the most part, the social reality of AIM clients varies from the founders, staff, and volunteers. Primarily with the influence of popular Hip Hop culture, one potential disconnect between AIM clients and the rest of the agency's groups (founders, staff, and

volunteers) is around the social-economic class divide in the arena of social values and cultural expressions (e.g. dress, language, etiquette).

How AIM Bridges the Generation Gap

Intergenerational Democracy

AIM exists as an intergenerational democracy. Leadership and decision-making are not reserved for the elders in the AIM community. Particularly concerning programmatic activity, young staff members are able to make decisions with assistance from elder leadership. The role of college student volunteers in the intergenerational democracy is discussed below.

As mentioned before, while the emphasis is on serving youth ages 5-18; the AIM community is intergenerational (ranging from the young service population to include young adults through mature adults in their 50s). I noticed the intergenerational character of AIM during my first observation of an AIM activity, Camp AIM High in June, 2005. During the morning of my first visit, Camp AIM High exhibited the intergenerational character of AIM. At 6 AM the staff woke up before the clients to meet and evaluate the previous day's activities, and to plan for the day's work. The camp staff of approximately twenty people, mostly young adults in their twenties with a few teenagers and mature adults (thirty-five and above) sat in a circle. The teens participating as camp staff were selected because of their academic work and social responsibility in the Teen Leadership Program during the year.

The most visible camp leadership came from the Hip Hop Generation. Ray Gavins and Kendra Hart, the coordinators of the camp, acted as chairs of the meeting. Gavins is a Family therapist who has worked extensively in the nonprofit community, particularly with "at risk" males. Hart's relationship with AIM began as a volunteer intern when she was a sophomore at Spelman College. She eventually became a staff member in the role of youth coordinator. After graduating from Spelman, Hart went to graduate school in North Carolina and is currently working on Ph.D. in school psychology (Sandra Barnhill, personal communication, September 28, 2005).

Sandra Barnhill sat to the side and rarely spoke. If asked a question by someone in the meeting, she often deferred to Gavins, Hart, or other responsible camp leaders. Most assemblies began with camp coordinators Gavins and Hart at the podium at the south end of the room. The coordinators patiently and calmly brought everyone to attention. Gavins reflected a calm demeanor, never raising his voice or chastising the audience. Hart generally greeted the assembly with a smile and a cheerful disposition. Their joint presence demonstrated collaboration on their part.

While Gavins and Hart were coordinators, other camp staff and volunteers were given tasks and had to rely upon their own creativity to design camp activities. One example was a treasure hunt assigned to staff during the morning meeting. After being given the assignment, a team of three staff members identified hiding places and created clues to locating the treasure. Their clues were based upon content of workshops and activities of

the camp. Camp participants would have to work together in small teams to locate the clues and find the treasure. The working together in small groups reinforced the theme of 2005 Camp AIM High, "Ujima," the concept of collective work and responsibility derived from the Nguzo Saba, the African-centered principles which provide the basis for AIM's curriculum. At the end of the day the activities were evaluated by the group, which helped facilitate the growth of the staff and volunteers as leaders.

Camp AIM High is just one example. Intergenerational democracy is an essential element of AIM culture throughout the yearly activities. While Barnhill is generally present at most AIM activities, the staff are primarily responsible for working with secondary and primary school aged clients with the support of the volunteers. When I attended the "Back to School" night in August of 2005, Barnhill took the same posture in relationship to young leaders as in Camp AIM High. At "Back to School" night, staff member James Francois was the central authority figure. Francois called the youth to order. After everyone chose a seat, Francois officially greeted the TLP group back. He stood at a podium while clients, staff, volunteers and Barnhill sat in a circle. The opening assembly is called the "Umoja" (unity) circle. Immediately after assembling the group, the young AIM staff member led an ice-breaker activity to get everyone involved. Barnhill was present, but deferred most questions to Francois.

While Barnhill often defers to youth leadership, the staff, clients, and leadership still view her as the central authority figure of AIM. She is a maternal figure for the organization, not only because of her age but also because of her role in the program. One of the most vivid examples of this comes from 2005 Camp AIM High. Prior to a session in which an AIM Board member was to present, some of the campers were slow to settle down. Some of the staff (including young and mature adults) tried to bring order, but a few campers continued to involve themselves in playful chatter. When Barnhill walked on the scene all of the sudden there was silence.

The elder group of AIM does not manage the organization as an oligarchy or through authoritarian rule. Through the commitment to intergenerational democracy, young adults are empowered to lead and take responsibility of managing the camp utilizing the guiding principles of AIM. While age is respected, merit becomes the basis of recognition and level of responsibility.

Sense of Interconnectedness

AIM also exists as a surrogate family for youth whose households are fragmented by the incarceration of a parent. AIM is a space where clients receive nurturing, discipline, and social orientation. Sandra Barnhill appears as a surrogate maternal figure that – along with the staff and volunteers – nurtures, disciplines, and instructs. As AIM's central maternal figure, Barnhill vocally expresses affection to AIM clients. At Camp AIM High during breakfast, I observed Barnhill going to each table and greeted each camp participant by name often telling campers that she "loved" them and how special they are.

At every AIM session I observed administrators, staff, and volunteers enthusiastically greet clients. One example of this was the 2005 "Back to School" night. When the clients arrived, each was enthusiastically greeted and embraced by Barnhill, staff members, and volunteers. The teens came into the AIM House smiling, exuberant, and responding to the salutations of AIM personnel and volunteers with enthusiastic greetings. Each person was offered some fruit (golden apples and grapes) and water and allowed to socialize before the session officially started. This scenario was generally repeated throughout the school year.

In 1997, after initiating the after-school program, the concept of the "AIM House" was born. The AIM House was intentionally created as a space with a relaxed, domestic oriented environment. While the AIM House is a center for academic learning, it is also a space for guidance, truth telling, problem solving, nutrition, nurturing, and celebration. The center of the AIM office is designed as an inviting and comfortable space, where information provision and intergenerational and peer dialogue can occur. Meals are shared by clients and volunteers at AIM, under the supervision and service of the staff. Meals provide a space not only for socializing, but also for socialization and to practice social etiquette. While the administration and staff are nurturing, they are not afraid to privately or publicly challenge the clients for behavior that falls outside of AIM principles. On a typical after-school program evening, Barnhill and staff monitor tables. On one occasion, while speaking about the necessity of proper table etiquette, Barnhill tapped the arms of TLP members (and even the ethnographer) for eating with elbows on the table. No one complained. Everyone (including me) complied.

The existence of a family-oriented space is essential to developing the relationships necessary to have active participation from the clients. The clients receive nurturing and support that may be lacking in their households and communities. New staff members have to demonstrate their commitment prior to acceptance by the clients. The clients expect a level of commitment from the staff and volunteers that goes beyond a paycheck or college credit for service learning. When staff and volunteers earn respect from clients, in turn they can place demands on the clients. The establishment of relationships is central to AIM's organizational culture and contributes to the development of young leaders.

Creation of a Safe Space

For many clients, the AIM House is a safe space where teenagers can negotiate with peers and adults for attention and recognition within the context of community. For example, the teens receive acknowledgement for their labor. One example of this was during the cleanup for the meal for the after-school program. Teens were designated each evening to assist staff and volunteers with cleanup and to reorder the dining space. There was no complaining about being assigned to do this task. Some teens, particularly many of the young men, seemed enthusiastic about working alongside staff to complete these tasks. The staff praised the teen workers for a job well done.

AIM also provides a space where youth, outside of the school environment, can receive positive reinforcement and support for academic success. For youth whose peers and, sometimes households, don't value academic achievement, AIM is a space where they can be recognized. Experts have commented on the lack of reinforcement for academic achievement in low income, urban communities (Kunjufu, 1988; Fordham and Ogbu, 1986; Griffin, 2002). For example, while all AIM clients received presents during the Holiday Party special presents were given to those who excelled academically, as well as those who had shown the most improvement. When Justin Tanner received his gift for improvement he exhibited a robust smile. He also shouted "Me? Me?" indicating he was surprised that he was the recipient of an academic acknowledgment. His peers clapped and shouted out his name, "Justin, Justin." Tanner enthusiastically ran up to receive the gift, thereby demonstrating pride that he was deemed by AIM staff worthy of this recognition. In the safe space of AIM, it's "cool" for a Black male from the inner-city to be acknowledged for academic achievement.

A safe space that values diversity becomes a vehicle for allowing young people to discover their place in the AIM community. In this context, diversity refers to respecting and valuing a community that has a variety of skills, talents and interests. Within the AIM space, young people are allowed and encouraged to develop their special characteristics, while being challenged by individuals (Barnhill, AIM staff, and volunteers) who, the youngsters believe, care about their achievement. This creates a foundation for their development as young leaders.

Keys to Success

Two facets of AIM's programs facilitate its organizational culture, intergenerational democracy, environment that emphasizes connectedness, and creation of safe spaces: a strong volunteer base and the retention of clients. The involvement of (college) student volunteers and teenaged clients (who have been involved in AIM for years) provides a basis for AIM to meet its goals of youth leadership development.

Strong Volunteer Base

AIM has a strong volunteer base. The value of intergenerational democracy that facilitates the development of young professionals is also extended in different ways to college students. For the college student volunteers, the democratic culture of AIM offers possibilities as a nonprofit professional and as a socially conscious citizen.

Relationships with faculty and programs at local colleges and universities, particularly Spelman College and Georgia State University (GSU), produce the majority of the AIM volunteers. This is particularly true of those volunteers who work directly with the TLP. In the 2005-6 academic year, 80 volunteers participated in AIM. Of the 80 who volunteer in some capacity, 25 are involved in AIM activity at least on a weekly basis. Some of the volunteers start service learning at AIM to complete a course requirement. Many continue a relationship with AIM after completing their faculty-assigned service. In a focus group of AIM volunteers, all ten participants said they would have a

relationship with AIM after the current semester was over. One factor in the high participation of AIM volunteers is that they can see the impact they are making in the development of the clients. During an interview, one volunteer commented:

> I think the relationships that I've built, and I guess over time you want to see them grow and make strides just like any of your younger siblings. I know one of the younger kids, Calvin. Last year, he was tough. He was a handful, and I've seen him grow over time, and this semester he's really been – behavior has been in check, he's been more focused, so that's like a reward I get for getting to see the growth (Stephen Wilson, personal communication, November 9, 2005).

Finally, the AIM community – particularly the administration, staff and clients – lets the volunteers know their labor and perspectives are valued. An example of this is the importance placed on hearing the evaluations of the volunteers at the culmination of nightly TLP sessions. After one after-school session in September of 2005, six volunteers (three GSU and three Spelman students) gathered round the conference table adjoining the AIM House common space area. James Francois presented them evaluation forms. The volunteers silently filled out their forms. Francois went through each question of the form for oral feedback. Francois wanted to know if the volunteers had any challenges. One female GSU student commented she struggled settling some of the teens down for tutoring. She also noted a few clients failed to bring homework. Before Francois responded, he asked the volunteers "Do you have any solutions to her challenge?" Some experienced volunteers, knowing the particular clients being referred to, offered tips to motivate them to achieve. Francois took notes of the comments and suggestions of the volunteers. Their participation in regular evaluations is a principal way AIM's principle of intergenerational democracy is extended to volunteers.

One volunteer, Stephen Wilson, a sophomore at GSU, has volunteered with AIM for two years. Wilson has been involved in the AIM children's after-school program and the TLP during the school year, and Camp AIM High in the summer. He has not determined a particular career choice. Wilson is very comfortable in his interactions with AIM clients and staff. He takes responsibility without being instructed by staff members. Witnessing his participation at AIM, a casual observer would not be able to distinguish him as a volunteer and not a staff member. He has a humble demeanor but is comfortable and assertive with his relationship with AIM clients. Commenting on his role in the program Wilson stated:

> I just really try to build relationships with the children, and be a good role model, try to answer as many questions as I can, try to be helpful, try to be positive, definitely in terms of some of the things I might be going through whether at school or at home, or just trying to show that I've been through some of the same things and some of the same concerns that they had…(Stephen Wilson, personal communication, November 9, 2005).

With the training and experience he receives at AIM, Wilson possesses human capital that could be potentially be used in a career in community service.

Even after leaving weekly service at AIM, some volunteers continue to maintain a relationship. One Spelman senior (she graduated Spring Semester 2006), who was also a child of incarcerated parents, organized a campaign to collect funds to purchase gifts for AIM clients for the Christmas holiday. At the holiday party, the college student testified that her experience working with AIM clients deeply affected her consciousness. She wanted the clients to know, that while she could not continue to be active in the program due to financial reasons, she was still committed to AIM.

The above examples clearly exhibit that volunteer service in AIM provides college students a sense of commitment to service that is significant. These volunteers become a valuable resource to the program, whether they participate on a weekly basis or contribute on special projects. Their commitment and essential role in the program makes them unpaid staff. Some volunteers may decide to utilize this experience to choose a career in community service or education. For others, volunteering at AIM may provide an orientation for active citizenship and promote a sense of volunteerism throughout their adult lives. A recent study by the non-profit leadership forum, Independent Sector and Youth Service America (2002), shows that involving young people in community service increases their likelihood of volunteering and financially contributing as mature adults. The development of potential leaders and active contributors in civic life is one of AIM's most significant contributions.

Retention of Clients

Participants in the TLP average from five to seven years of participation in the program. The interconnectedness of the AIM (surrogate) family / community and the AIM safe space provides a place where clients have a sense of place and ownership. AIM is not just somewhere TLP members come twice a week. It is a community where they have a feeling of belonging. To the clients, AIM does not just belong to Sandra Barnhill and the staff, but to the youth the program serves.

For AIM teens, longevity in the program reinforces the sense of ownership and understanding of how the program functions. They demonstrate their ownership by testing new staff and volunteers when they start their tenure at AIM. I experienced this while being introduced by Sandra Barnhill to the AIM community at Camp AIM High. I was greeted warmly by staff after being acknowledged by Barnhill. On the other hand many of the campers seemed more cautious in their reception. After I participated in meals and physical activities (cleaning up and exercise), and led a workshop, I found myself warmly received by AIM clients. The cautious response I received upon meeting the campers seemed to transform into acceptance, particularly after I led a workshop on the camp theme of *Ujima* (Collective Work and Responsibility) with the campers. My contribution and participation with the group the AIM client / camper provided a basis for me to be accepted into the group.

Reflecting on the expectations AIM clients have for student interns, volunteer Stephen Wilson noted when he saw a few AIM clients in the community (outside of the AIM House) he received a warm reception. Wilson goes on:

> but I had been coming regularly, so it wasn't anything, but if I hadn't been coming to AIM and I just saw them, they'd be like "oh yeah, you're that guy, how come you don't come" or whatever." I think they (AIM clients) definitely would question why you just stop coming, because you build relationships and then you just breaking them, like acting like you care for the 15 hours (required for service learning credit) and then just after that you're gone. So if you have the time, why not? (Stephen Wilson, personal communication, November 9, 2005)

Clients want to know the commitment of new members to the community. While the administration and staff may have acknowledged someone as a new staff member or volunteer, the TLP client wants the new community member to demonstrate his or her dedication to the group.

While in some ways AIM clients have not transformed their lives into examples of the principles of AIM, they can articulate and apply the principles intellectually. For example, AIM utilizes the Nguzo Saba, or Seven Principles of Kwanzaa, in the after school program and Camp AIM High. The Nguzo Saba include "Umoja" (Unity), "Kujichagulia" (Self-determination), "Ujima" (Collective Work and Responsibility), "Ujamaa" (Cooperative Economics), "Nia" (Purpose), "Kuumba" (Creativity), and "Imani" (Faith). AIM presents the Nguzo Saba as standards to counter negative social forces that are active in the communities of AIM clients. As a part of the AIM Kwanzaa celebration, the TLP participants were asked to apply the Nguzo Saba to AIM programs. The TLP participants successfully found and articulated practical applications of each principle to AIM activities. For example, two AIM clients, Dontavious and Jerry, offered the following examples of how AIM applies the principle *Umoja*:

- During the Umoja circle and telling each other how our day went, this brings us closer and we realize we are not alone and it unites us;
- We always work together to get a job done, because you can't do a job alone and if you do it alone it wouldn't be as good as it would be if you used unity;
- Staff and volunteers come together to help the program pull together at all times

Another session demonstrated their familiarity with the functioning of the program, particularly the necessity of fundraising, selection of personnel, and acquiring public support for the mission.

The longevity of the TLP clients, most joining AIM as elementary school age children, helps transform the clients into valuable agents – and, potentially, leaders – in their households and community. With AIM curriculum reinforced over the years, AIM philosophy serves as a weapon to improve life chances and to survive day-to-day. One participant commented that participation in AIM kept him "out of jail." When asked: how does AIM prevent him from being involved in the criminal justice system, he replied: "they talk with us every day about it mostly" (Justin Tanner, personal communication, October 3, 2005). I interpret that to mean AIM staff and volunteers constantly reinforce the necessity and the benefit of making the choices that keep him from being incarcerated. Whether it's helping to make a client a student leader, an honor student, or

keeping them out of the criminal justice system, hearing this message in an intimate setting on a weekly basis is critical in the lives of participants.

Challenges Facing AIM

Negative Social Forces

Negative social forces are active in AIM clients' communities and neighborhoods. As previously mentioned, substance abuse, a high volume of crime, and challenging physical and mental health conditions are common in the clients' neighborhoods. Clients also suffer consequences from having lost their mothers from their households. Often problems that clients experience in their home and social environment play a role in disruptive behavior exhibited in AIM activities. At Camp AIM High, in the middle of one activity, two young campers, a young man and woman from different neighborhoods, engaged in fighting words, threatening each other with violence. The young woman stated she would "get my homeboys" to harm the young man. The young man retorted "get your homeboys." TLP leader James Francois intervened. The young man was visibly upset. Francois calmly took the young man away from the assembly and engaged him in conversation away from the group for a couple of hours. At another assembly, the young man apologized to the assembly and the young female camper. He committed himself to work on his anger and to live by what he had been taught at AIM. While staff was able to effectively resolve conflict in this instance, negative social forces are ever-present obstacles to transforming clients into a positive agents in their own lives, households, and communities.

Social Class Gap

More apparent than the generation gap is the social class gap. AIM administration, staff and college student volunteers come from similar middle class backgrounds. This results in a disconnection between the social orientation and values of the AIM administration, staff, and volunteers with those of many of the clients. For example, most of the administration, staff, and volunteers have or are pursuing a college education, which exhibits a valuing of academic enterprises. Many of the clients have to be challenged by the staff and volunteers to commit significant attention to school work and intellectual development.

One evening in October of 2005, an incident illustrated the social class divide centered on the value of academics. AIM clients have to turn in school report cards to AIM staff. One AIM client, who has been in the program over five years, had a failing grade in math. Once this was discovered by AIM staff everyone stopped whatever activity they were engaged in and assembled in the Umoja Circle. James Francois led the discussion around the significance of academic achievement for the progress of each AIM client and the community. While the one failing grade was the focal point, Francois seemed disappointed with the collective academic performance of clients to that point. He emphasized "we are a family, so if one of us is failing, all of us are failing." Other staff and college student volunteers participated in the discussion. The majority of the clients

seemed indifferent to the discussion. The discussion climaxed when Sandra Barnhill, upon coming into the circle and listening in, gave the clients an ultimatum:

"We have put too much sacrifice into building this program for some of you not to take AIM seriously. If you are not serious, don't come back," exhorted the AIM maternal figure. Dinner was served after the discussion. To reinforce the seriousness of the failure in an academic subject by one client and the collective responsibility for achievement, Francois ordered that dessert not be served to anyone that evening. This brought some quiet protests from many of the teens. One young lady, who had good grades said "I won't be back!" (Note: She returned the following session and remains a consistent participant.) The exuberance and concern demonstrated by staff and volunteers versus the indifference of AIM clients exhibits the divide of two social classes around academic achievement. Again, research demonstrates that academic achievement is not valued in communities that AIM clients come from. Since the leadership, staff, and volunteers primarily represent upwardly mobile sectors of the African-American community, a tension exists around the value of education. This is a significant challenge to transforming clients into productive and self reliant adults, agents of change, and leaders in their households and communities.

Another aspect of the social class gap is the sensitizing of middle class college students to their stereotypes of low income, urban youth. James Francois commented that some college student volunteers, particularly males, either romanticize communities clients come from (the "hood") or make disparaging and stereotypical remarks like "I'm afraid to go to those neighborhoods." Both attitudes present problems and obstacles to the objective of making volunteers effective service professionals or socially conscious citizens and leaders in civil society.

Staff Turnover

One critical challenge towards the development of youth leaders and the continuity and stability of the program is rapid staff turnover. Whereas the AIM clients have significant longevity in the program, the staff is relatively new. Personnel turnover is not uncommon in the nonprofit service community. But to achieve the goal of training new social service and educational professionals, staff members need to commit years to working within the AIM structure. Without a commitment to work within the organization, young professionals won't be able to establish themselves in the field or gain from the experiences and mentorship of the administration and the board. Staff turnover also affects the morale of staff and clients and affects program continuity.

Turnover also challenges the functioning of AIM. Given the essential connectedness that is the foundation of the program and the expectations of the clients for staff and volunteers, turnover affects the morale of AIM and TLP. When a leading staff person in the TLP resigned in February 2006, the clients' participation wasn't as enthusiastic the following month. When I attended a session in March 2006, after this staff member resigned, the enthusiasm that I observed early in the year had waned. The attendance was a little smaller and the greetings were more subdued.

Recognizing the challenge of turnover, the administration has implemented measures to address this issue. In 2005, the administration consolidated part-time positions into full-time to attract staff that could be committed to work for multiple years to maintain program continuity and relationship with clients. AIM administration is also seeking to implement intensive professional development for staff members. I participated in a session with staff to give them background on the principles of Kwanzaa. The staff was very engaged, curiously asking questions and taking notes. Their written evaluation of the session indicated they wanted more sessions that enhanced their personal development. One of the complaints raised by nonprofit employees is the lack of "professional or personal growth" (Otting, 2004). A deliberate program of professional development could strengthen staff's commitment to work a longer period of years with AIM realizing employment at the programs increases their human capital.

Learning to Accept Differences

While the clients are from similar ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, learning to accept difference, particularly in the area of sexuality, presents a challenge. It is necessary to create safe spaces for teens that identify themselves as gay, lesbian, or bi-sexual in the context of peers who are hostile towards diverse sexual identities and orientations. According to staff member Cornelius Lloyd, one male client, who identifies himself as gay, has on occasion gotten into confrontation with other males in the program. While this has not prevented him from participating in the program, it certainly challenges the "safe space" environment that the AIM House strives to provide for the clients.

Conclusion

One challenge to the development of young leadership in the African-American community is the generational divide. That gap is not inevitable. AIM demonstrates that different generations within the Black community can cooperate to meet the goal of collective and individual advancement and improving shared life chances. Elders have information and, based upon their wisdom and experiences, establish principles and operational guidelines. At the same time, young adults must have freedom to initiate and create within the context of the principles and guidelines. Space must be created where the younger generation coming into maturity can succeed and fail and have the support of elder leadership through evaluation and critique. Evaluation is institutionalized into every aspect of AIM. Younger participants, whether staff, volunteers, or clients, have the space to offer critique. This is an essential element of the intergenerational democracy.

In every aspect of the AIM program, relationships are essential for creating the necessary environment to impart information. Relationships are crucial to the operation of AIM, from Board and administration to staff, from staff to volunteers, from staff and volunteers to clients and their households. The building of relationships assists the development of a space where individuals from different generations communicate towards common objectives.

T'Shaka argues that bridging the African-American generational divide requires an alliance between scholars and activists in both generations. He argues this alliance will have the legitimacy to influence the younger generation, particularly those sectors who are designated "at risk," (T'Shaka, 2004, p. 66-7). AIM serves as a model for intergenerational training and development of young leaders. It also demonstrates T'Shaka's paradigm of cooperation between the Civil Rights / Black Power movement generations and the older Hip Hop generation (born between 1965 and 1984) to assist in the development of the younger Hip Hop generation. The principle of intergenerational democracy serves as an essential tool to break the chasm of the African-American generational divide. The example of AIM must be studied and improved upon to eliminate the generational divide and empower young leaders in the battle against the "powerful hostile forces" that challenge Black America and our contemporary reality.

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