

WE ARE THE 100'S PROJECT RECAP

AUGUST 15, 2017



As audience members settled into their seats in the auditorium at Harlan High School on Friday August 11th, noises and teenagers bounced around the room. Students darted up the stage's steps and slid behind the curtains while set pieces were rolled across the stage. The short performance incorporated everything from straight acting and spoken word poetry, to singing, dancing, and rapping. The first act began with students waiting at a bus stop and ended with a violent shooting. Next, the set was transformed into a beauty salon, the community hangout. The kids poured into the salon and ricocheted jokes and jabs off one another, discussing the violence surrounding them. Despite the comical tone of the scene, its culminating song, backed by claps and stomps, struck a much darker note: "Killin' everywhere, kill- killin' everywhere, black body here, black body there."

The final act abstractly depicted a high school football game, beginning with the national anthem, then a powerful poem peppered with football allusions, a dance performance, and ending with a spoken word piece by the program's leader from Generation All, Chris Thomas. Thomas made several cameos in the show, but his influence on the performance was apparent even when he was off the stage. Many of the dance interludes incorporated a style of dance called footwork, a fast-stepping style native to Chicago and popularized by Chris and other dancers alongside him. Like footwork, the show itself was fast-paced and

mesmerizing; every part of the performance artistically portrayed a realistic view into life in the 100's, all while showcasing each teen's individual talents and abilities to work with one another.



Preparation for the performance had begun 6 weeks earlier, when the 100's Project kicked off. "We Are the 100's Project" is not a theatre or dance camp, but a knowledge and skill-building summer program for teens from across the "100's" neighborhoods of Chicago, such as Roseland, Pullman, Beverly, and the Altgeld Gardens Projects. The brainchild of

Generation All's Chris Thomas, the program was funded by After School Matters, a non-



profit that provides teens with after

school and summer program opportunities. For 6 weeks the teens met for several hours and learned about the mission of Generation All, and developed an understanding of their community's educational landscape and the power structures that influence citywide policy decisions. The students created asset maps of their own schools, considered the issues in their own neighborhoods, and engaged with one another to identify strategies and resources to overcome these obstacles. The program culminated in a final performance intended to demonstrate the storytelling and communication skills the students had developed into order to inform the public about their experiences living in the 100's, and the issues and solutions they see in their own communities.



After the show the students sat on the edge of the stage and took questions from the audience. When asked what they took away from the program several students spoke up, saying they learned how to collaborate and be more open minded. They appreciated meeting people from different neighborhoods and hearing about their experiences and how they were either different or similar to their own. Princess, an alumni of to Senn High, described her experience,

"I never experienced what people in the 100's are going through, and it really touched me on a bigger level. These kids are crying for help and there's no one around so the community has to come together to help these kids see a better future."