

ASPECTS



OF



THE



ACHIEVERS!



*Thoughts from the A5 Leaders on the
2008 Summer Leadership Conference*

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This weekend has had me thinking a lot about what I have to do to be a good, positive leader. I learned that you can't always be young and gifted, but you will always be Black!

-Diamante Hughes
West Aurora High School

From this conference, I feel that I can make a school a better place and raise my grades even higher. The word 'black' is a very powerful word! I learned that our ancestors have set the standards for us and that everyone has a meaning in this world. WE ARE ONE!

-Brea Sims
Waubonsie Valley High School

This was a weekend of a lifetime! Greatly resembling CNN's Black in America, the A5 Summer Leadership Conference has given me great direction as a Black male heading off to college. It is a great organization that will definitely broadcast the attributes of the Black youth of Aurora.

-Brian Nelson
*Waubonsie Valley High School/
Bethune-Cookman College*

After this weekend, I learned to open and expand my mind, to have vision, strive for personal excellence, never settle for average, and most of all, be a PHENOMENAL, young, and educated Black woman!

-Carlise Smith
Waubonsie Valley High School

I am young, gifted, and Black! Plain and simple! I will continue to stay and maintain my gifts and talents, and, of course, my beautiful Black skin! I am filled with the style and manners of the characteristics presented. I have become a new Black young man!

-Jonathan Townsend
East Aurora High School

This weekend, I can honestly say that I gained knowledge and solutions. What I mean by this is that when you gain knowledge, you begin to question things; not only did I have questions, but I received answers to all of them. I also learned not to follow the crowds. Leaders often walk alone. No, I'm not a thug and no, I don't 'make love in the club', because that is the kind of stuff holding us back. I am what I am and that is: Young, Gifted, and Black! Thank you!

-Joy Hamilton
Neuqua Valley High School

A5 is a very nice program for young Black men and women! A5 is a great program to change a negative person into a positive person. One of the things that I learned is to set positive goals and if you work hard towards those goals, you will accomplish them and even more!

-Yaakov Rodgers
West Aurora High School

This conference has taught me that being Black and succeeding in life will be tough. However, if we can take all of the negativity to heart and transform it into positivity, we can be the best!

-Tyriecce Gordon
West Aurora High School

This conference has pushed me to strive for my best and voice my opinion! A5 is a place that teaches young African-Americans that they can make a change and not fall into the stereo-typical places that we expected to be in. I appreciate that greatly!

-Carter Jordan
Neuqua Valley High School

This conference has empowered me to break stereotypes and defy expectations. I will strive for my personal best for the good of myself and my race!

-Tavis Gibson
Yorkville High School

The A5 Conference instilled in me the values and knowledge that I need to break free of African-American stereotypes. I was reassured that I have the power to change the course of someone's life as well as my own. I now know that in order to change the face of tomorrow, I need to focus on making the best of my opportunities today!

-Ashley Holt
Waubonsie Valley High School

My overall outcome for this weekend is: Educated! I have learned so much and I feel that I am a much stronger person walking out of the door on Sunday than I was coming in on Friday. I already love my new A5 family, and I really look forward to working with you all! Thank you!

-Jamario Taylor
East Aurora High School

I've learned a lot! There are a lot of intelligent African-Americans in the world and it is programs like A5 that bring people out. Now, it is time for me to step my 'A' game up!

Erinn Brooks
Oswego East High School

We, the privileged individuals, have been blessed to the founding fathers of A5. We are initiating a ripple in our community, igniting the spark to light the City of Lights, serving as that butterfly to change the wind currents, and dreaming dreams to insure the future! We have been changed because of this conference. We now have the confidence as a whole to take the first step, change lives, and mold our future leaders. I, too, am Aurora and I am young, forever gifted, and Black!

-Darryl Walker
*East Aurora High School/
North Central College*

This weekend was filled with so many successful people. I thought I might be bored talking about politics and history, but I really loved it and want to share all the success that we have made with others. For sure, this was a life-changing weekend!

-Brianna Peeples
East Aurora High School

I walk away from this weekend with feelings of empowerment and love. I felt empowered because of the messages and the people who connected with me. I felt love because of the concern of everyone who wants to help and guide Black people as a race.

-Tommie Lee Perry IV
East Aurora High School

Wow...this weekend was amazing! From this conference, I have learned that we shouldn't be ashamed of our gifts! It's time to take off the mask and break the stereotypes of Black people!

Jonelle Meeks
*West Aurora High School/
Waubonsee College*

What I learned from this amazing conference was to be a better leader and to stand up for what I believe in! I also learned to never give up on my dreams and aspirations.

-Jermaine Brooks
East Aurora High School

I feel that I shouldn't be afraid to speak my mind. Once you speak your mind, others may have the same ideas that you have. You may never know what other people think or know if you are not willing to share your knowledge first!

Amira Rice
West Aurora High School

Each One, Reach One...This was a weekend filled with strategies and life-lessons in being Black and how to deal with being Black. We exchanged our ideas on how we would like to change the outlook and stereotypes of Blacks in Aurora. I feel that this weekend taught us how to not cover up the mask we may wear because we are accomplished Black males and females. This weekend I learned how to have the courage to be young, gifted, and Black!

Adrian Davenport
West Aurora High School

A5 has taught me so many things already. I am very glad that I was chosen to be a part of this conference. More Black youth should be a part of A5 so that they can gain the knowledge that I have gained in just these few days.

-Cynthia Smith
West Aurora High School

This weekend was a wake up call for me! I learned that you cannot win without pain! This helps me to realize that through my struggles in life, I will progress and become great!

-Tracy Cooper
West Aurora High School

***LEARNING FROM THE PAST...
LEADING INTO THE FUTURE...***

A5

BLACK STUDENTS LEARN FROM PEERS, ELDERS

Weekend experience enriches opportunities for Aurora teenagers

July 27, 2008 – Aurora Beacon News

By **ANDRE SALLES** –Staff Writer

AURORA -- Jonathan Townsend wasn't sure what to expect when he walked into the Hampton Inn and Suites this weekend.

Townsend, a 16-year-old sophomore at East Aurora High School, was one of 24 locals chosen to participate in the African-American Achievers Academy of Aurora (nicknamed A5), a weekend opportunity for young black students to meet their peers, their elders and, hopefully, their inspirations.

A special project of the African-American Heritage Advisory Board, A5 is a chance for the next generation to meet those who have made a difference and talk about the issues facing the black community in Aurora. As the chosen 24 heard on Saturday, A5 is about passing the baton, one generation to another.

Still, Townsend admits to approaching the weekend with skepticism. But once he arrived, he found others like him, sharing his perspective. And among the panelists, which included local black leaders like Aurora Township Clerk Juan Thomas and community activist Avis Miller, Townsend found people who have been where he is and gone on to do great things.

"Everyone else here feels the same way I do," Townsend said. "I'm not the only one trying to make a change."

According to Clayton Muhammad, who serves on the Advisory Board, Townsend is exactly the kind of student they hope to reach -- young, gifted and ready to learn. He said he's seen a tremendous level of energy from the A5 attendees this weekend, students who are "ready to shatter the stereotypes of young black men and women."

On Saturday, the A5 students heard from Aurora-area college students, who encouraged them to stay in school, pursue college and present themselves well during interviews. They then engaged in a lively discussion with a panel of local black female leaders, moderated by Miller, about the process of passing information from one generation to the next.

Both students and panelists ran with the baton metaphor, taking it in new directions. Students admitted to not taking the baton from their parents, and panelists copped to sometimes dropping the baton, but all expressed a desire to learn from each other.

"Being here today has enlightened and encouraged me," said Jackie Gibson, Miller's daughter, who teaches seventh grade in the East Aurora School District. "I see some folks who are ready for the baton."

Brian Nelson, an 18-year-old graduate of Waubonsie Valley High School, said he was impressed by the panel of college students, who taught him ways to combat the stereotypes of black and Latino men. Nelson plans to study mass communications at Bethune-Cookman University in Florida in the fall, and said seeing his successful peers was inspiring.

Even at 16, Townsend is looking at colleges -- he's narrowed his choices down to three.

Townsend has come a long way. He said his father was never around, and his stepfathers led him down some dangerous paths, into drugs and theft.

"There are people who have told me my future will amount to nothing because of my background," he said. "But you can come up from it, and do amazing things."

Today, the A5 students will hear from Pastor Katrina Smith, of Aurora's Family and Faith Christian Church, and they will finalize plans for a service project, an outward symbol of what they've learned this weekend.

Muhammad said he is pleased with the first A5, and plans are under way for this group to meet bi-monthly and continue the discussions. And he hopes A5 will become an annual event.

"Everyone is energized, everyone is thirsty," he said. "They're all asking: when can we meet again?"

'I, TOO, AM AURORA'

Teens must know leaders to become one

July 27, 2008 - Aurora Beacon News

by Erika Wurst- Staff Writer

AURORA -- Are you smarter than a sixth-grade Cowherd Middle School student?

That's what East Aurora District spokesman Clayton Muhammad asked a group of young, gifted and black students as he flashed pictures of 20 famous black leaders on an overhead screen.

Cowherd sixth-graders could name 16 of the 20 faces, ranging from P Diddy to East Aurora School Superintendent Jerome Roberts.

On Friday, Muhammad posed the same question to the older group of teens during the African-American Achievers' Academy of Aurora held Friday through Sunday. If these young leaders ever expected to be a leader, they must know where they came from, right down to their Aurora roots.

Instead of frolicking in the summertime breeze, about two dozen of the Fox Valley's finest young teens gathered at the Hampton Inn and Suites in Aurora to discuss leadership in the black community on both a local and national scale.

"I, too, am Aurora," Muhammad said to the group of well-dressed achievers as he gave them yet another challenge. The name of the session, "I, too, am Aurora," was also the weekend program's motto.

What could these teens do to break stereotypes of young blacks in a town where preconceived notions often run rampant?

"When people think we're thuggish, we need to step out of those stereotypes and grow into more experience black males," one teen said. "It will set us apart."

Another thing they could do was learn about influential families and individuals in their own back yards, and aspire to be like them, they were told.

Name a school named after a black person, Muhammad asked, telling the student to number a paper from one to 10. Name a black city council member, the black police chief of Aurora, a cultural celebration for or about black people.

One by one they rattled off the answers -- Scheketa Hart-Burns, Chief Bill Powell, Juneteenth.

While the weekend conference discussed national topics, such as blacks in politics as a whole, it was the local focus that Muhammad stressed.

"How are you here and all of your friends are out there?" Muhammad asked. "Why are you here?"

From gangs, to children having children, teens rattled off reasons their young counterparts aren't succeeding in an area where only about 23 percent of black teens are doing well in school.

Their next mission: What were they going to do to change it?