



# ASpire

AN INSPIRATION  
NOVEMBER 2014

City of Philadelphia  
**MuralArtsProgram**

# ASpire

BY BLACK THOUGHT

I learned the way South Philly played at such an early age  
What my father was into sent him to his early grave  
Then Mom started chasin that base like Willie Mays  
My childhood was all of 40 nights and 40 days  
Trouble was my ball and chain  
Shorties would call me names  
Humble beginnings  
Black Thought is what it all became  
My journey – from a dirty hallway to the hall of fame  
Music – my therapeutic way to cope with all this pain  
I was headed for the drain  
Soakin before the rain water came  
And chaos until the order came  
To start doin what I'm supposed to do in life  
Tryna move out of the dark and closer to the light  
They say if you get a chance to do it over, do it right  
And ASpire to be higher  
Like my brother Shawn White



Dr. White's son, Asa.  
Photo: Lamont Wilson

# About Dr. Shawn

Dr. Shawn L. White, MHS, PhD – aka- Air Smooth earned a Master of Human Services from Lincoln University in 2004, and in 2011 he earned his PhD in Human Services from Capella University. Shawn began his professional career in social service at the Youth Outreach Community Awareness Program (YOACAP), where he worked for more than 16 years, as a cast member and peer educator for an HIV/AIDS awareness stage plays. At YOACAP, he was instrumental in the writing, development, casting, and training of four youth awareness psychodrama presentations geared towards helping youth and young adults make positive life choices.

He was one of four co-founders of “Voices of The Village”, a non-profit organization focusing on behavior modification, building /enhancing life skills, peer education and increasing support for young entrepreneurs. One of the co-founders, Terrell Brown, was one of the countless students that Shawn mentored while working at YOACAP. Like Shawn, Terrell witnessed a significant need in the Philadelphia community for a program like Voices of the Village, and the two men banded together to form this wonderful organization.

Most recently he was employed as program director at the University of Pennsylvania's School of Nursing, conducting an insightful research study entitled “Barbers Building Better Brothers” – An African American Male Health Promotion Project. Prior to this, he worked at Drexel University as a researcher for the “Represent” study, which explored the gender role norms and sexual scripts of heterosexual African American men in Philadelphia and their risk for HIV infection.

Musically, Shawn was professionally known as “Air Smooth”. He was an accomplished music producer and recording artist with a wide array of musical & instrumental talent. In 1993, Shawn was a regular in the studio working alongside names like Amir Thompson

# White

(Quest Love) and Scott Storch of “The Roots”, who produced three songs for their initial demo. Other notable collaborations include working with Larry Gold, Kenny Whitehead, DJ Woody Wood and DJ Tat Money to name a few.

In 1994, Shawn earned his first major recording contract with Warner Brothers Reprise Records as a member of the group “Divine Beings”. On his first release on the label, Shawn collaborated with Kwame` to produce the first single titled “Funky Ultimatum”. During that same year, Shawn was invited to perform alongside Jazz Great Steve Coleman and subsequently spent two-months touring Europe as a vocalist (MC) within the group, Steve Coleman and Metrics.

By early 1996 Divine Beings had disbanded and Shawn began to focus more on the production side of music. It was in the summer of 1996 that Shawn began working with Dwight Grant, professionally known as Beanie Sigel (however – then known as Beanie Mack). It was Shawn’s guidance and nine-song demo tape he produced that assisted in Beanie Sigel’s signing to Roc A Fella records.

After a lengthy hiatus from the music industry, Shawn partnered with long-time friend & musician, JaRon Burnett, to form the production juggernaut known as the PHREMAN Music Group, rooted in Hip Hop with influences in Soul, Rock, Jazz and World Music. Now solely spearheaded by JaRon, PHREMAN Music Group continues its commitment to producing numerous projects including film scores, community education projects, and collaborations with industry recording artists, internationally.

Both Shawn & JaRon spent their professional careers advocating & implementing initiatives to assist urban youth, so the duo decided to share their knowledge of the music industry with our youth by forming the PHREMEN Audio Studio Academy. The PHREMEN Audio Studio Academy is a program for African American young men, teaching audio studio engineering, coupled

## Constant Struggle

BY AIR SMOOTH

Constant Struggle it’s a come up  
So I live my life day to day with a hustle just to make it  
A little bumpin on the side  
Wasn’t just to get big time  
Just tryna get by  
Cuz no one supports I  
But honestly it’s cool though  
It ain’t nothin new though  
Cuz Ima get mine and there you go, so um  
What you see is what you get  
And I ain’t got a pot to pee in  
And you know the rest so that’s that  
I walk around every day  
I see the same things, same places, same faces, and I’m like hey  
I just wanna survive until the next day  
Maintain to last in this society  
And not end up like the others that done fell flat  
The same ones I used to look up to way back  
Back in the days when I was a young buck  
Hangin out with the ol’ heads tearin’ up  
Not aware where it would lead me to in the long run  
A part time hustla just out to start shhhhh  
Got in and got out – yeah that was the move  
Without fallin victim to greed and it was cool

with HIV & STD awareness, and conflict resolution interventions. In 2012, Shawn was awarded a Black Male Engagement (BMe) Grant through the Knight Foundation for the development of the PHREMEN Audio Studio Academy. The BMe grant helped the duo fulfill their desire to give back to the community by marrying their gifts of music with helping urban youth. The PHREMEN Music Group is now solely spearheaded by JaRon Burnett, and the music program continues to flourish with new student enrollments in each program cycle.





# The Project

The City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program and Tariq “Black Thought” Trotter, of the Grammy® Award-winning band The Roots, worked over a year together on ASpire, a mural project celebrating the life of Shawn L. “Air Smooth” White, Ph.D. Dr. White was a community leader, father, and educator who created educational health initiatives on HIV/AIDS as well as sexually-transmitted diseases aimed at young African American men in Philadelphia.

In his mid-thirties, Shawn was diagnosed with hypertension. His friends and family knew of his condition but no one, not even Shawn, knew how severe his condition was. On April 6, 2013, despite his healthy appearance, Shawn L. White succumbed to his condition and passed away.

The mural has been accompanied by a rigorous schedule of workshops and paint days. The project was kicked off April with a news conference at Audenreid High School. Shortly after, the school hosted REFUGE, a full day workshop where students created vision boards and were inspired to think about their personal journey and to map the plan to attain their personal goals.

After REFUGE, we began a series of workshops and programs in barbershops bringing successful men living their dreams together with young men in attendance to talk about the strategies they used find their success. First Person Arts facilitated a writing workshop, providing a safe space for young men in Mural Arts Guild, a program of Restorative Justice, the space to step back, reflect, and think about where they have been and where would like to go.



Photo: Kevin Brown

*Refuge Workshop Photos by Lamont Wilson.*

And then there is the mural which was painted by over 250 individuals at venues all over the city. ASpire is installed at 2054 Ellsworth Street in the Point Breeze neighborhood of Philadelphia where Shawn grew up, in a beautiful garden which Shawn's sons, Quadry and Asa, and his family and friends can visit for years to come.

Nicole Fisher, the executive producer of the documentary-memoir *From Man to Man: The Legacy of Air Smooth*, and mother to his youngest son, is the driving force for keeping Dr. White's legacy alive. "Shawn was so full of life and dedicated to helping young men make better choices in their lives," she says. "It's of the utmost importance that we continue to tell his story and inspire each other to live healthy, full lives."



## SPECIAL THANKS

**Our Funders** City of Philadelphia, City of Philadelphia Department of Human Services, PhillyRising Collaborative, Hummingbird Foundation, JP Morgan Chase, Bryan Weingarten, Lenfest Foundation, I.B.E.W. Local 98, Philadelphia Activities Fund and the City of Philadelphia Prison System.

**Our Partners** City of Philadelphia Youth Violence Reduction Partnership, Councilman Kenyatta Johnson, EPIC South, KBI Solutions-Non Profit Consulting, Universal Audenreid Charter School, Universal Companies and the BMe Community..

# THE MURAL **ASpire: No Limits**



©2014 City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program/Ernel Martinez

The lead artist Ernel Martinez was born in the small country of Belize. He was raised in south central Los Angeles and Detroit. His introduction to art was through the underground world of graffiti. He studied art at the Pratt Institute and obtained his BFA from Kutztown University. In 2004, he received his MFA from the University of Pennsylvania. Based out of the Philadelphia area, he explores creative methods to give underserved communities the tools to tell their stories through art-making. He uses their stories as a framework to produce artwork based in social practice that engages and build dialogue. He believes that art enriches communities and is the path to “true” collaboration.

Martinez was aided by assistants from the Mural Arts Restorative Justice Program, which provides art instruction, mural making, community service work and a paid work program, the Guild, within the criminal justice system. Inmates, returning citizens and juveniles are afforded the opportunity to learn new skills and make a positive contribution to their communities to repair prior harm caused, reclaim public spaces, develop competency skills and engage victims of crime in dialog.

BY ERNEL  
MARTINEZ

ASSISTED BY

Stephanie Acevedo | LaTasha Billington | Gloria Martin | Antoineka Sanders | Elise Stewart | Melissa Lyn Yeager | Members of Mural Arts Restorative Justice Program - The Guild, and youth from the mentorship program at the ??

ASpire PARTNERS

Universal Companies, the RFP Mentoring Program, City of Philadelphia Councilman Kenyatta Johnson, Epic South, Universal Audenreid High School, KBI Solutions NonProfit Consultants, and the Youth Violence Reduction Partnership (YVRP).

MANY THANKS TO OUR  
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# Mural Dedication

## ASpire: No Limits

**Saturday, November 8, 2014; 12-2pm**  
**2054 Ellsworth Street**

Opening music by Jahiti | Recorded music by DJ D.A.M.

### WELCOME

**Lorraine Ballard Morrill** EMCEE  
Director of News and Community Affairs, Clear Channel Media+ Entertainment

### REMARKS

**Jane Golden** Executive Director, City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program

**The Honorable Anthony Hardy Williams** Pennsylvania State Senate

**Tariq “Black Thought” Trotter** MC, The Roots  
Board Member, Philadelphia Mural Arts Advocates

**Eve Lewis** Vice President of Corporate, Universal Companies, Inc.

**Ameer Brown** Participant in RFP (Redemption Forgiveness, Peace) Barbershop Workshops

**Shande Holland** University of Pennsylvania and Philadelphia AIDS

**Dr. Frederick Burton** Health and Wellness

**Oshun**

**Wanza Poole** Original Barbershop Conversations

**Linda Burnette** President & CEO, Youth Outreach Adolescent Community Awareness Program (YO-ACAP)

**RaJon Burnette** Co-founder PHREMEN Audio Studio Academy

**Nicole Fisher** Executive Producer of documentary memoir *From Man2Man: The Legacy of Air Smoot*

Introduce **Fat Nice**

### CLOSING

**Lorraine Ballard Morrill** EMCEE

RIBBON CUTTING AND PHOTO OPPORTUNITY

REFRESHMENTS

# Barbershop Pop-up



Dr. Shawn White



Photo: Kevin Brown

BY KEVIN ASKEW BROWN  
KBI - Non Profit Consulting

**Dr. Shawn White's death left a void** in the area of educational health initiatives aimed at young African American men in Philadelphia. Shawn was a researcher and project director for the University of Penn's "Shape Up: Barbers Building Better Brothers" study, which conducted research interventions in collaboration with barbers and their clientele. In this spirit, I enlisted African-American male artists to engage young men in barbershops through public performance, art making, conversation, and networking.

Barbershops are typically a place where men gather to share ideas and discuss current events. And, the barbershop pop-up art events repurposed that space to foster intimate dialogues and propagate self-esteem and cooperative edification.

Moreover, the barbershop pop-up project was designed to further encourage African-American male empowerment. These transformed spaces served to showcase Black men from all walks of life. Actors, poets, painters and other artists of various modalities were invited to perform. The interactive experiences included a cast entirely of African-American male artists. And, their performances were solely crafted for an audience of African-American males. The objective was to use the arts, as a tool, to articulate the Black male perspective regarding a myriad of topics.

The performances also included an artist talk – which provided an opportunity for the patrons to converse about each of the themes. Aside from the artist's talks, the patrons engaged in various forms of art making related to the milieu of the performer. Upon conclusion of each pop-up the patrons received related resource material - to support the topic at hand. Patrons were also encouraged to network and stay connected using the AspirePhilly Hash tag – which links each of the events via social media.

Additionally, I provided a questionnaire that solicits the answer to three questions:

- What is one question that you'd like to ask Black men as a whole?
- What would be one thing you'd like to say to Black men?
- What is one statement that you'd like to make about Black men?

The anecdotal information provided by the questionnaire will be used to recommend action items and supplemental community-based programming. The objective was to identify authentic demand as it relates to the needs and concerns for men of color -pertaining to themselves and their neighborhood.

The Barbershop pop-up series provided requisites for self-definition. And, it also included logistical matters of claiming physical and metaphysical spaces to gather, discuss, and exchange ideas for community improvement and personal enrichment. Thusly, it was transformative for all of those involved. Particularly, because it existed outside the bounds of imposed stereotypes and preconceptions. We gathered as men but we left as brothers.



Photo: Tim Whitaker



Photo: Kevin Brown



Photo: Kevin Brown



Photo: Kevin Brown

We gathered as men but we left as brothers.

# **Workshop Essay and image**

# ASpire: The Dr. Shawn L. White Mural Project

## Mural Arts Program Staff

Project Manager: Cathy Harris, Director of Community Murals  
Special Events and Communications: Almaz Crowe



## SPECIAL THANKS TO

### Our Steering Committee which was instrumental in the development of this project:

Tarik Trotter, Nicole Fisher, JaRon Burnett, Kamau Stanford, Eve Lewis (Universal Companies), Al Custis (Chief of Staff, State Representative Jordan Harris), Ade Fuqua (PhillyRising Collaborative), Mike Bell (EPIC South), Otis Bullock (Diversified Community Services), Gary Bell (BEBASHI), Roi Ligon and Tiphonie White (Councilman Kenyatta Johnson's Office).

### Curriculum Development and Facilitators of REFUGE

Nicole Fisher, Lamont Wilson (Photographer), Greg Corbin (PYPM – Philadelphia Youth Poetry Movement), Saadiq Garner (Mayor's Commission on Human Relations), Gabriel Bryant (Department of Behavioral Health and disAbility Services), Will Little, Nicole Giles, LaToya Winkfield.

### Barbershop Program, Coordination, Barbers, and Presenters

Kevin Brown (KBI Solutions Non Profit Consultant), Program Manager

Will Little (RFP), Coordinator

Shear Talent Barbershop, Tachi Wilson – Owner and Derrick Young - Barber

Jazz You Up Barbershop, Fawwaz Beyha – Owner and Will Little - Barber

### Presenters

Vernon Keith Ruffin Jr. – Comedian

Whitney Thomas – Photographer

Maximilian Tucker - Hip Hop Artist

Jabari Jefferson – Painter

V. Shayne Frederick Jazz Vocalist & Key

Khalil Munir - Dancer and Actor

Salim Weldon - Whimsicle - Artisanal Frozen Fruit

Seun Olubodun - Fashion Designer/Graphic Artist

Jarreau Wimberly - Marvel Comic Book Illustrator

Joseph Conyers - Philadelphia Orchestra - Classical Bassist

Fese MrHabull - Rapper

Jerry Rudasill - Shakespearean Actor

Michael Deleon - Poet

Johnnie Hobbs, Jr. - Dramatist

Michael Wilson - Saxophonist

Johvon McGloughlin - Robotics Engineer

Brian Anthony Wilson - Actor

Shannon Newby - Filmmaker

Jahiti - Songwriter and Acoustic Guitar Player

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#### ASPIRE MURAL DISCOUNT

20% off total order of 12 cupcakes, or more, when mentioning the ASpire Mural at in-store checkout. Offer valid from November 1 - 15, 2014.



Front and Back Photos: Lamont Wilson

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