

**Conversations with Gary Youth**  
**Indiana University Northwest and Roosevelt High School**  
**Gary, IN**  
**2006 - 2007**

## **Introduction**

Through a grant from the Project on Civic Reflection, Indiana University Northwest has been holding a series of civic reflection conversations with students from Roosevelt High School in Gary. Using a diverse set of readings from African-American and Afro-Caribbean history and culture, eighteen students, ranging from freshmen to seniors, have been meeting since fall 2006 to explore their responsibilities as citizens and community members. Their conversations are being facilitated by Scooter Pégram, an assistant professor of French and Minority Studies at IUN, with support from long-time RHS teacher and counselor Otis Richardson. Among the questions they have discussed are *What responsibilities do I have to myself and those around me? What do I, and those around me, think, value, and believe? What is my relationship to others in my community? How do we “belong” to each other?*

Pégram notes that he always makes a conscious effort to tie the themes of the readings to the students' own lives in Gary. Typically the group spends a few minutes having refreshments and discussing a local issue before delving into the readings and questions of the day. Students in the program were given blank notebooks in which to keep journals, and many have been doing creative writing inspired by the readings and conversations. Mr. Richardson plans to print the best of the student writing from the journals in a student magazine in spring 2007.

Pégram feels gratified at being able to represent IUN as a “good neighbor” to the city of Gary and wishes that there were more such programs. He hopes to involve more IUN faculty and to secure funding that will allow the university to continue “Conversations with Gary Youth” over the long term. “Judging by the hugs and ‘high fives’ that I get when I come and go, the participating students very much look forward to the sessions. They’ve responded very positively to this project, and for that I could not be happier.”

## **Participants**

A group of 18 students from Roosevelt High School (RHS), an RHS teacher/counselor, and a faculty member from Indiana University Northwest (IUN).

## **Facilitators**

Scooter Pégram, Assistant Professor of French and Minority Studies, IUN; Otis Richardson, special education teacher and counselor, RHS.

## **Guiding Questions and Readings**

- Who am I? What do I think, value, and believe? Who are we? What is my relationship with others?

- With whom do I interact/live? Who are they? What do they think, value, and believe? What is my relationship to those around me?
- What are my responsibilities to self and/or those around me? How do we ‘belong’ to each other?
- Where do I live? What’s that place/community like? What is my contribution there?
- How can I influence/enhance who I am, who others are, and where I live?

### **MEETING 1**

- Martin Luther King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail”
- One or two complementary poems taken from the following selections:
  - “The Rose That Grew From Concrete” by Tupac Shakur
  - *The Spoken Word Revolution: Slam, Hip Hop & the Poetry of a New Generation* by Mark Eleveid editor March Kelly Smith
  - *Hip-Hop Poetry and The Classics* by Alan Sitomer and Michael Cirelli

### **MEETING 2**

- First half of *Senioritis* by Tate Thompson.
- One or two complementary poems taken from the following selections:
  - “The Rose That Grew From Concrete” by Tupac Shakur
  - *The Spoken Word Revolution: Slam, Hip Hop & the Poetry of a New Generation* by Mark Eleveid, editor March Kelly Smith
  - *Hip-Hop Poetry and The Classics* by Alan Sitomer and Michael Cirelli

### **MEETING 3**

- Second half of *Senioritis* by Tate Thompson.
- Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”
- First half of *Dream Freedom* by Sonia Levitin.
- One or two complementary poems taken from the following selections:
  - *The Rose That Grew From Concrete* by Tupac Shakur
  - *The Spoken Word Revolution: Slam, Hip Hop & the Poetry of a New Generation* by Mark Eleveid, editor March Kelly Smith
  - *Hip-Hop Poetry and The Classics* by Alan Sitomer and Michael Cirelli

### **MEETING 4**

- Second half of *Dream Freedom* by Sonia Levitin.
- Thomas Jefferson, “The Declaration of Independence;” Sojourner Truth, “Ain’t I a Woman?”; Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “Declaration of Sentiments”
- One or two complementary poems taken from the following selections:
  - *The Rose That Grew From Concrete* by Tupac Shakur
  - *The Spoken Word Revolution: Slam, Hip Hop & the Poetry of a New Generation* by Mark Eleveid editor March Kelly Smith
  - *Hip-Hop Poetry and The Classics* by Alan Sitomer and Michael Cirelli