

HIP-HOP:

Beyond Beats & Rhymes

A FILM BY BYRON HURT



“ A hip-hop head weighs in on manhood in hip-hop culture ”

HIP-HOP: Beyond Beats and Rhymes takes an in-depth look at manhood in rap music and hip-hop culture—where creative genius, poetic beauty, and mad beats collide with misogyny, violence and homophobia. This groundbreaking documentary is a “loving critique” of certain disturbing developments in rap music culture from the point of view of a fan who challenges the art form’s representations of masculinity.



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LETTER FROM THE FILMMAKER

I've seen the film *Hoop Dreams* at least 50 times. "Wow, Byron you must have really loved that movie," you might say. Well, I did enjoy it, but not *that* much.

Hoop Dreams closely followed the lives of two Chicago-area high school basketball stars, Arthur Agee and William Gates, as they pursued their dreams of making it to the NBA. Directed by Steve James and executive produced by Gordon Quinn, *Hoop Dreams* made a huge splash in the sports world and in popular culture. It won numerous awards and ushered in today's genre of reality-TV sports documentaries.

I was a key player in the *Hoop Dreams* educational outreach campaign, a co-branded effort developed by Kartemquinn Films and the Center for the Study of Sport in Society. I was in my early twenties, and worked as a mentor-training specialist at Sport in Society. Using *Hoop Dreams* as a teaching tool, I co-facilitated dozens of guided conversations about the sobering realities of high school, college, and professional athletics with young, urban, high school-aged boys. It was during this outreach campaign that I realized the potential of films to engage, educate and inform young, receptive audiences. I saw first-hand how social oriented documentary films, when used in the classroom, make a difference far beyond the movie theater or the television broadcast.

James and Quinn handpicked Sport in Society because of its position within sports culture and its experience deploying well-trained former and current athletes in front of a captive audience. They knew that Sport in Society could help them do what they as filmmakers could not do alone – reach a large targeted audience of high school athletes, using the expertise and resources of a talented, committed staff.

I kept this in mind as I produced and directed HIP-HOP: Beyond Beats and Rhymes. The film is currently receiving standing ovations from diverse audiences around the nation, and is creating amazing conversations around race, class, gender, and media. Outreach was always a part of my vision. It's one of the reasons why I chose to make HIP-HOP: Beyond Beats and Rhymes as dynamic and as accessible as possible to young people. I wanted to make a film that would undoubtedly engage students in classrooms and in public forums the way that I witnessed *Hoop Dreams* achieve.

You are not required to be an expert on rap music and hip-hop culture to use HIP-HOP: Beyond Beats and Rhymes. All you need is to be committed to creating a healthy space for young people, and spark meaningful dialogue around the issues presented in the film. I encourage you to find ways to sustain the energy that comes out of the guided discussion, and to courageously take action.

And have fun with it! My experience has been that the most exciting and the rewarding part of HIP-HOP: Beyond Beats and Rhymes comes *after* the film. I believe you will have the same experience. Thank you for supporting my efforts to raise awareness around media literacy, race, class, and gender issues, using hip-hop as the platform. Just remember, as the rap group Dead Prez says, "It's Bigger than Hip-Hop."

Be blessed,

Byron Hurt

Producer, Director – HIP-HOP: Beyond Beats and Rhymes

"I sometimes feel bad for criticizing hip-hop, but I guess what I am trying to do is get us men to take a hard look at ourselves."



THE FILM

Hip-hop has undeniably become the universal language for young people—from kids in urban neighborhoods, to youth on reservations and suburban hamlets. No longer the domain of “inner city” youth, hip-hop culture is exported across the globe, providing millions a window into the hearts and minds of a handful of mostly young, male African American artists. The lyrics and videos of these mainstream artists often present a world of violence and drugs, newfound wealth and materialism, homophobia and misogyny.

The violent and hypersexual imagery in hip-hop has been a topic of heated debate on school campuses, in civic organizations, legislative sessions, women’s magazines, churches and homes. These debates stir strong emotions, with particular resonance among African Americans, arguably the community most affected by the negative messages and stereotypes reinforced by the music. The conversations expose divisions along lines of gender and sexual orientation and between hip-hop’s young fans and their Civil Rights era elders.

Even outside of the African American community, opinions about hip-hop are deeply polarized with little room left for a middle ground. Some defend the right to self-expression or argue that hip-hop encourages entrepreneurship; others link it to an increasingly nihilistic youth culture that supports violence against women and homosexuals. Missing from the debate are tools to help communities lead and sustain productive conversations that engage all sides. HIP-HOP: Beyond Beats and Rhymes examines representations of manhood, sexism, and homophobia in hip-hop culture through the eyes of an adult fan, an African American male and anti-sexism trainer. Instead of offering simple conclusions about hip-hop’s fans and creators, the candid voices in the film describe the cultural and political environment in which the music is created, commercialized and consumed.

Parents, educators, artists and other professionals can use the film and resources in this guide to engage both young consumers and media makers in discussions about gender, race and community values. To support media literacy, facilitators can also encourage young men and women to reflect on the impact of violent and sexual imagery on themselves, their relationships and their communities. The film and guide can also inspire intergenerational conversations on an increasingly violent, materialistic and sexually explicit American culture using hip-hop as a point of reference. As each generation expresses itself in a new musical genre, hip-hop is the voice of today’s youth. With these resources viewers can better listen, understand and respond.

Key People Featured in HIP-HOP: Beyond Beats and Rhymes



Byron Hurt

Documentary filmmaker, anti-sexist activist/lecturer, former college quarterback



Jackson Katz

Anti-sexist educator, author and filmmaker



Jada Kiss

New York-born rapper



Talib Kweli

Brooklyn-bred hip-hop artist and founding member of duo, Black Star, with Mos Def



Toni Blackman

Rap lyricist, vocalist, actress, writer and U.S. Hip-Hop Ambassador



Jelani Cobb

Assistant Professor of History at Spelman College

“The reason why braggadocio and boast is so central to the history of hip-hop is because you’re dealing with the history of black men in America.”

Jelani Cobb, Assistant Professor of History at Spelman College



About the National Community Engagement Campaign

HIP-HOP: Beyond Beats and Rhymes is the centerpiece of a National Community Engagement Campaign developed and implemented by ITVS, Firelight Media and the National Black Programming Consortium. The HIP-HOP Community Engagement Campaign aims to:

Engage young people in reflection, discussion, critical thinking, and problem-solving around the cause and effect of sexism, homophobia, and violence within hip-hop culture

Support the work of local organizations that serve youth by providing a media tool with expert training, resources, and connection to their peers

Generate a national conversation on an increasingly violent, materialistic and sexually explicit American culture using hip-hop culture as a point of reference

Provide opportunities to sustain conversations catalyzed by the film and move audiences from dialogue to action on the issues raised in the film

Emphasize the positive and creative contributions of hip-hop, one of the most pervasive and dynamic global art forms engaging young people worldwide

Using HIP-HOP: Beyond Beats and Rhymes to Engage Communities

HIP-HOP provides an excellent prompt to discuss a range of thought-provoking issues. Narrowing down the scope of the conversation will help you identify your event's goals, community partners and target audiences.

Potential Partners

Depending on the themes you have chosen to address in your event, you might consider finding speakers, panelists, co-sponsors or discussion leaders from one or more of the following areas (below). Collaborating with a group that you have never worked with before might inspire new conversations and solutions.

- Educators and Counselors in High Schools and Juvenile Detention Centers
- School-Based Peer Resource / Health Education Professionals
- Colleges / University Departments of Gender Studies, Media Studies, African American Studies and Athletics
- Youth Organizations – Youth Leadership and Development, Mentoring Programs, Former Youth Offender Programs, Gender-Specific Empowerment Groups
- Violence Prevention Agencies and Task Forces
- Hip-Hop Organizations and Political Coalitions
- Women's and Men's Civic, Faith and Professional Associations
- Media Literacy Organizations and Media Accountability Campaigns

- Gay/Straight Alliances, Sexual Violence Prevention Groups
- Civil Rights and Social Justice Organizations
- Black Pan-Hellenic "Greek" Organizations
- Sororities and Fraternities in general
- Local Public Television Affiliate and/or Commercial TV Stations

Potential Screening Activities

The activities below suggest ways to engage a variety of audiences using the film. They range from simple screenings to more elaborate, strategic uses.

- A violence prevention agency might organize a public screening to launch or promote a new initiative on teen dating violence.
- A high school might organize a month-long effort focused on improving self-esteem and healthy relationships among teens. The school might partner with a violence prevention agency to train youth facilitators, coordinate gender-separate screenings and dialogues and mixed-gender dialogues that would culminate with the development of a code of conduct agreed upon by all students and faculty.
- A cultural center or arts organization might organize a screening and panel discussion with artists from various generations and genres on such topics as: the evolution of youth culture, the role of the artist in the community, artist as change-agent, the connection between culture and community wellness, oral traditions in different cultures or consumer power.
- A civic organization might host a screening and panel of speakers from a women's advocacy group, sexual violence prevention task force, hip-hop coalition and media watchdog organization to discuss strategies to meet the needs of local youth.



DISCUSSION PROMPTS

The guide is written for a variety of professionals and viewers. To make it easier to find questions that meet your needs, discussion questions are divided into four sections.

- General Discussion
- Media Literacy
- Manhood and Gender Identity
- Gender Violence and Homophobia

General Discussion

Take a few moments after the film to allow the viewers time to process what they have seen. Gauge the mood of the participants. If the group needs more time to decompress before a discussion, offer time for a free write where viewers jot down their feelings before speaking. Choose one or two questions from this list to begin the conversation.

1. If you could respond to one person in the film, who would it be and what would you say?
2. What person or scene made the strongest impression on you?
3. In the opening of the film, filmmaker Bryon Hurt says, “*What I am trying to do is get us men to take a hard look at ourselves.*” Do you feel he succeeded? Why or why not?
4. Read aloud the character quotes from the guide. Ask participants to choose a quote that represents the most compelling argument in the film. Explain your choice.



Media Literacy

1. Who do you feel bears the greatest responsibility for the images in hip-hop videos—directors, artists or record company executives? What responsibility do viewers carry? In what ways might viewers hold these players responsible for images they deem unacceptable?
2. Jada Kiss argues that most violent lyrics are for entertainment and should not be taken literally, much like action movies are accepted as fantasy. Does all violent imagery (action movies, hip-hop videos, news clips) feel the same to you? What is the line between violent imagery and entertainment?
3. Should artists create socially responsible work? Why or why not? Are artists of all ethnic backgrounds held to the same standards when it comes to creating responsible art? Where might those differing expectations come from?
4. When speaking of white fans, rapper M-1 argues that their appreciation and understanding of hip-hop is “*as put on as baggy jeans*”. In another scene, a young white woman explains that interest in the music, “*appeals to our sense of learning about other cultures,*” but that it also reinforces stereotypes about African Americans. What are the implications when a musical genre serves to represent an entire community?
5. Filmmaker Byron Hurt defends his critique of hip-hop by saying that he is also a fan. How would you have felt if the filmmaker was not a fan? Was not African American? Was a woman? How does Byron’s onscreen identity impact your reaction to his critique?
6. What did you learn about the record label’s influence over the types of artists that are signed and heavily marketed? Do you think that record companies base their decisions on economics, politics or aesthetics? What are some of the effects of those decisions?
7. Consider the quote by Talib Kweli:

“We have trusted the media and the corporations to define what hip-hop is.... We have never let the media define us, so why are doing that now?”

Brooklyn-bred hip-hop artist and founding member of duo, Black Star, with Mos Def

Who do you think Mr. Kweli is referring to when he says “we?” In what ways are each of us involved in supporting the mainstream definition of hip-hop?

Manhood and Gender Identity

1. Do you agree with Michael Eric Dyson's statement, "*The notion of violent masculinity is at the heart of American identity*"? What examples can you think of to support or refute this notion?
2. Ask the group to consider the trajectory of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's career from action hero to statesman, or the career of Jesse Ventura, a professional wrestler-cum-state governor. Imagine how a hip-hop artist such as Jada Kiss might be viewed if he attempted to enter into political office. How are perceptions of masculinity influenced by the economic status of the person? How are they shaped by race?
3. "*We're playing a role from the time we're seven and we're walking down the street and someone calls us a sissy, sucker, church boy, and we start playing that role.*" In this quote, Rev. Conrad Tillard speaks about the roles that young men play to maintain the respect of their peers. Where do young men receive messages about what it means to "be a man"? In what circumstances are young men encouraged to be sensitive? What are the implications of a society that raises young men to stifle certain emotions, and project others? Why should we support young men who refuse to "play the role".
4. In a scene from Daytona, Florida a group of young women are asked how they feel when they are called derogatory names because of how they are dressed. One woman responds, "*It's not really directed towards you personally. I know he's not talking to me. I know what I am.*" At the same time, one young man explains, "*You know who are the b***s cause you see how they are dressed...sistas don't dress like that.*" If mainstream hip-hop has put manhood in a box, how has the music reinforced a limited view of what it means to be a woman?
5. Rev. Conrad Tillard argues that, "*we have to challenge this notion that it's ok for black males to die early.*" Do you believe that Americans have become desensitized to images of violence against black men? If so, how have we arrived at this point? Can hip-hop artists describe the realities in their communities and also challenge that notion? How can communities challenge that notion?

Gender Violence and Homophobia

1. Hurt describes his work as an anti-sexism trainer that lead to an increased sensitivity to degrading lyrics in hip-hop music. Can you recall an incident, or series of experiences, that lead you to become more sensitive to how certain groups are talked about or portrayed in media? How have those experiences shaped your consumer choices?
2. Media educator Sut Jhally suggests that, "*hip-hop culture is not separate from the rest of American culture...the objectified female bodies are everywhere.*" If hip-hop music is an attempt to hold a mirror up to American society, what can we learn about the value of women's bodies in mainstream media?
3. Professor Jelani Cobb argues that, "*music videos have taken a view of women of color that is not radically different from the views of 19th century white slave owners.*" What "view of women" is Cobb describing? In what other ways can you identify the legacy of slavery within hip-hop culture?
4. Dr. Beverly Guy-Sheftall states, "*Generally speaking, Black people do not believe that misogyny, sexism and violence against women are urgent issues. We still think that racism, police brutality, black male incarceration are the issues that we need to be concerned about.*" Why do you think sexism has taken a back seat to other forms of oppression in certain communities? What would it take to elevate the importance of combating sexism in all communities?
5. While images of homosexuality have become increasingly common in mainstream media, homophobic slurs continue to be found throughout hip-hop lyrics. Why do you think hip-hop has become one of the last art forms to allow an openly hostile stance on homosexuality?



TAKING ACTION

Suggested activities to sustain the momentum from the screening and move your group from discussion to action.

Media Literacy

- Scan one video music channel, network or cable television channel for one night during prime time and document the damaging imagery you see. Write letters to broadcasters expressing desire for alternative images.
- Organize a letter-writing project that asks students to send letters to their favorite artists sharing their feelings about the lyrics. Have students research hip-hop groups that offer an alternative view to mainstream artists, and then choose one artist to support. Have the class request that artist's music daily for one month to see if the artist gets radio airplay.

Manhood and Gender Identity

- Encourage creative writing college departments to sponsor creative writing clubs at a local high school to support and share self-expression.
- Organize a citywide contest for youth to pen hip-hop lyrics that affirm women, denounce homophobia, show diversity in representations of manhood, and/or feature non-violent conflict resolution. Select a panel consisting of a local hip-hop artist, community elder, educator, peer and radio personality to judge contestants. Have the winners perform after a large community screening and on the local community radio station.

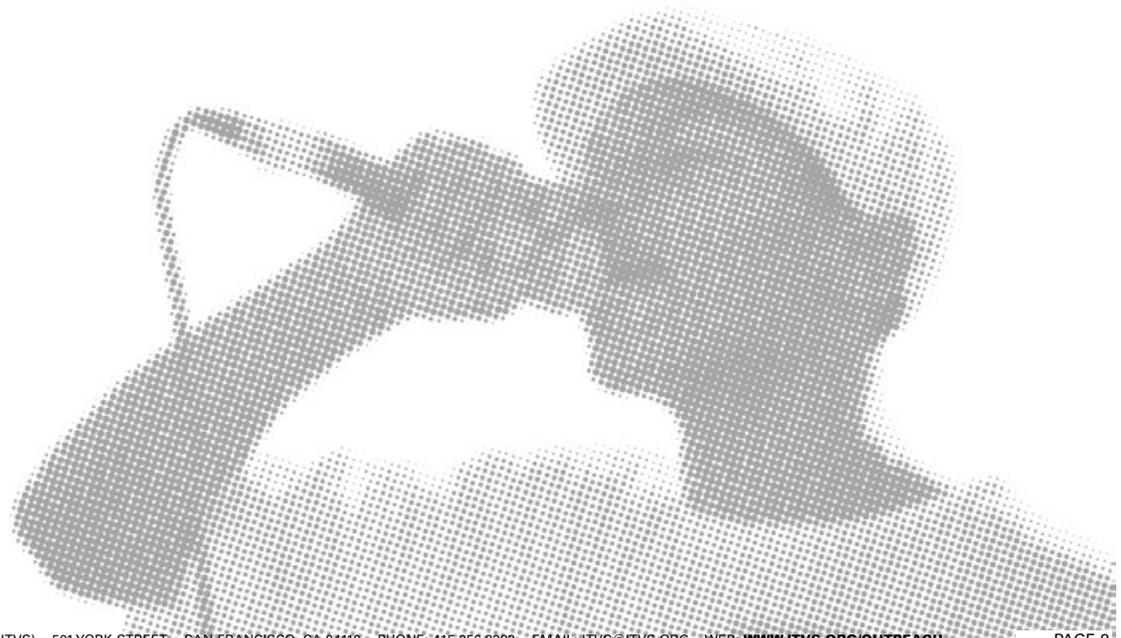
Gender Violence and Homophobia

- Encourage creative writing college departments to sponsor creative writing clubs at a local high school to support and share self-expression.
- Get groups to sponsor training for high school students on conflict resolution and realistic responses to gender and sexual violence.
- Work with violence prevention organizations to train college students on conflict resolution and violence prevention strategies, and then organize safe zones and harassment watches at local clubs.



“I jokingly say that I’m in recovery from hip-hop. It’s like being in a domestic violence situation. You’re home is hip-hop and your man beats you.”

Toni Blackman, Rap lyricist, vocalist, actress, writer and U.S. Hip-Hop Ambassador



NATIONAL PARTNERS AND RESOURCES

A Call to Men

www.acalltomen.com

A Call to Men is a leading national men's organization addressing men's violence against women, and the eradication of sexism, while maintaining strong coalitions with women's organizations already doing this important work.

Boys and Girls Clubs of America

www.bgca.org

The Boys and Girls Clubs of America aims to enable all young people, especially those who need us most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens.

Center for American Progress–Campus Progress

www.americanprogress.org

Campus Progress, part of the Center for American Progress, works to strengthen progressive voices on college and university campuses and to empower new progressive leaders nationwide.

Center for Family Policy and Practice

www.cffpp.org/

The Center for Family Policy and Practice is a nationally-focused public policy organization conducting policy research, technical assistance, training, litigation and public education in order to focus attention on the barriers faced by never-married, low-income fathers and their families.

Center for the Study of Race, Politics and Culture–University of Chicago

<http://csrpc.uchicago.edu/>

The Center for the Study of Race, Politics and Culture at the University of Chicago is an interdisciplinary program dedicated to promoting engaged scholarship and debate around the topics of race and ethnicity.

Center for the Study of Sport in Society

www.sportinsociety.org/

The Center for the Study of Sport in Society, utilizing the power and appeal of sport, works locally, nationally and globally to identify and address social problems in sport and in society.

Family Violence Prevention Fund

www.endabuse.org/

The Family Violence Prevention Fund works to prevent violence within the home, and in the community, to help those whose lives are devastated by violence because everyone has the right to live free of violence.

Gender Public Advocacy Coalition

www.gpac.org/youth

The Gender Public Advocacy Coalition works to ensure that classrooms, communities and workplaces are safe places for everyone to learn, grow and succeed whether or not they fit stereotypes for masculinity and femininity.

Just Think!

www.justthink.org/

Just Think! is a leader in media education in America that teaches young people to lead healthy, responsible, independent lives in a culture highly impacted by media.

Ms. Foundation for Women

www.ms.foundation.org/

The Ms. Foundation supports the efforts of women and girls to govern their own lives and influence the world around them.

National Hip Hop Political Convention

www.hiphopconvention.org/index.cfm

The National Hip Hop Political Convention is a developing national organization operating in 20 states throughout the country working on issues facing the hip-hop generation.

National Women's Alliance

www.nwaforchange.org

The National Women's Alliance is a community-driven, national advocacy organization dedicated to ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls of color.

Sports Leadership Institute–Adelphi University

<http://sli.adelphi.edu>

The Sports Leadership Institute at Adelphi University leverages the powerful influence that sports has on our culture to provide proactive and innovative programs addressing myriad social issues, while working to return the positive, educational and fun experience to all sport participants.

Women of Color Resource Center

www.coloredgirls.org/

Founded in 1990, the Women of Color Resource Center promotes the political, economic, social and cultural well-being of women and girls of color in the United States.

Youth Movement Records

www.youthmovementrecords.org/

Youth Movement Records is a non-profit, youth-directed recording company and youth development project based in Oakland, California.

Books on Hip-Hop

Bakari Kiwana, *"The Hip-Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture"*

Nelson George, *"Hip-Hop America"*

Joan Morgan, *"When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip-Hop Feminist Breaks It Down"*

Jeff Chang, *"Can't Stop, Won't Stop – A History of the Hip-Hop Generation"*

Yvonne Bynoe, *"Stand and Deliver: Political Activism, Leadership, and Hip-Hop Culture"*

Kevin Powell, *"Who's Gonna Take the Weight?: Manhood, Race, and Power in America."*

Natalie Y. Moore and Natalie Hopkinson, *"Deconstructing Tyrone: A New Look at Black Masculinity in the Hip-Hop Generation"*

Websites and Blogs

www.daveyd.com

One of the oldest and largest hip-hop sites written by hip-hop historian, journalist, deejay and community activist Davey D.

www.essence.com/essence/takebackthemusic/

The ESSENCE Take Back the Music Campaign was launched to help raise awareness of the negative images of Black women in popular culture.

www.bmbnrc.org.

Site of the Black Men and Boys National Resource Center, a database of organizations with proven, effective programming for Black men and boys.

www.okayplayer.com Okayplayer is an online community of alternative hip-hop recording artists.

CAMPAIGN ORGANIZERS

www.itvs.org

TELEVISION'S INDEPENDENT VOICE.



www.firelightmedia.org



www.nbpc.tv

CAMPAIGN NATIONAL PARTNERS

A Call to Men, Boys and Girls Clubs of America, Center for American Progress/Campus Progress, Center for Family Policy and Practice; Center for the Study of Race, Politics and Culture—University of Chicago; Center for the Study of Sport and Society; Family Violence Prevention Fund; Gender Public Advocacy Coalition; Just Think Foundation; Ms. Foundation for Women; National Hip-Hop Political Convention; National Women's Alliance; Sports Leadership Institute—Adelphi University; Women of Color Resource Center; Youth Movement Records.

GUIDE CREDITS**Writer**

Sonya Childress, Firelight Media

Reviewers

Dennis Palmieri, ITVS

Byron Hurt, filmmaker

Tracy Matthews, Center for Race, Politics and Culture

Ted Bunch, A Call to Men

Ann Wilder, Wisconsin Public Television

Marcia Smith, Firelight Media

HIP-HOP: Beyond Beats and Rhymes WILL AIR NATIONALLY ON THE EMMY-AWARD WINNING PBS SERIES, *INDEPENDENT LENS* ON TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2007 AT 10 PM. CHECK LOCAL LISTINGS.

Visit the *Independent Lens* Web site to take a closer look at HIP-HOP: Beyond Beats and Rhymes and explore the music and the issues. View a timeline of rap and hip-hop, examine songs and lyrics and read what the experts think—all online at www.pbs.org/independentlens/hiphop/ beginning January 2007.

HIP-HOP: Beyond Beats and Rhymes is produced by God Bless the Child Productions in association with the Independent Television Service (ITVS) and the National Black Programming Consortia (NBPC).

ITVS COMMUNITY is the national community engagement program of the Independent Television Service. ITVS COMMUNITY works to leverage the unique and timely content of Emmy Award-winning PBS series *Independent Lens* to build stronger connections among leading organizations, local communities and public television stations around key social issues and create more opportunities for civic engagement and positive social change. To find out more about ITVS COMMUNITY, visit www.itvs.org/outreach.

