



Press Contact: Juan Rivera, Youth Speaks  
(415) 255-9035 x20 or [jrivera@youthspeaks.org](mailto:jrivera@youthspeaks.org)

[www.kennedycenter.org](http://www.kennedycenter.org)  
Kelly Broadway, Corporation for Public Broadcasting  
[www.cpb.org](http://www.cpb.org) 202 879-9641 or [kbroadway@cpb.org](mailto:kbroadway@cpb.org)

## YOUTH SPEAKS ANNOUNCES AMERICAN GRADUATE RAISE UP WINNERS

### *Winners to Perform on September 28<sup>th</sup> at the Kennedy Center with Special Guests*

**SAN FRANCISCO, CA** – September 23, 2014 – Youth Speaks today announced the winners of the **RAISE UP** project, an online hip-hop and spoken word competition designed to foster discussion among young people and adults about the challenges and opportunities students face as they strive to stay on the path to graduation. The winners will perform in front of a live audience at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts on Sunday, September 28, at 6:00 p.m., with special guests Hill Harper, Gabriel “Asheru” Benn, Glynn Washington, Black Thought and DJ Questlove.

The RAISE UP project is part of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting’s (CPB) American Graduate initiative, a national, multi-faceted effort that harnesses the unique role of public media stations to increase the understanding of the dropout issue through broadcast, web and mobile platforms.

“Engaging young people on the need to stay in school has been at the center of the American Graduate initiative's efforts to address the dropout issue,” said Pat Harrison, President and CEO of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. “Public media stations and engagement initiatives such as Youth Speaks' Raise Up have played a vital role in raising awareness in communities throughout the nation.”

The **RAISE UP** competition took place from April to July 2014 drawing nearly 800 submissions from 15-22 year olds across the U.S. Contestants uploaded a video of themselves performing a hip-hop or spoken word poem about the dropout crisis to [www.raiseupproject.org](http://www.raiseupproject.org). Each entry was voted on using a three-tier judging process: the general public, a diverse group of panelists selected by Youth Speaks, and a panel of celebrities and youth leaders. The winners are Jonathan Williams from Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Jourdan Lee from New Orleans, Louisiana; Sarah O’Neal from Oakland, California; Nytesia Ross from Tyler, Texas; and Aaron Golden from Harper Woods, Michigan. Each of the five winners will be presented with a \$5,000 educational scholarship by the Will and Jada Smith Family Foundation.

Hosted by NPR’s Glynn Washington and billed as **RAISE UP – YOUNG PEOPLE TAKING ON THE DROP OUT CRISIS**, presented by *Youth Speaks* in partnership with the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts Millennium Stage, the evening will provide a national spotlight for

students to share their ideas about education and their future through spoken word. The program, co-sponsored by AT&T Aspire, will feature performances from each of the five winners, hip-hop artists Gabriel “Asheru” Benn, Black Thought and DJ Questlove.

The event will be streamed live at [www.kennedy-center.org/programs/millennium](http://www.kennedy-center.org/programs/millennium). In addition, AIR will record the evening for a radio documentary and video shorts detailing the competition and exploring how these young poets have transcended some significant obstacles to succeed. The AIR production will be scheduled for broadcast later this fall.

### **About The Raise Up Project**

*Youth Speaks* joined CPB’s efforts when it launched the national contest this past April. Youth were encouraged to write an original spoken word piece addressing the dropout crisis and submit a short video to the Raise Up website. During the three-month online video competition, Youth Speaks collected nearly 800 submissions from youth across the country, including Native American Reservations, major metropolitan and rural areas. The contest entailed a three-round process in which the public voted online for their favorite pieces. The final five were selected by a group of celebrity judges including hip-hop legend and media mogul Russell Simmons; actress and activist Rosario Dawson; actor Dulé Hill, recording artist and actor Common; Glynn Washington, the host of NPR’s *Snap Judgment*; education experts Rosslyn Ali, and Jeff Duncan-Andrade; and James Kass, Executive Director of Youth Speaks. The Association of Independents in Radio is producing complimentary radio and video documentary shorts that explore why these young poets drop out of high school and how, with inspiring determination, they transcend significant obstacles to succeed.

**The Raise Up Project** is powered by Youth Speaks through support from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, AT&T Aspire, and the Will and Jada Smith Family Foundation. Local media partners include WAMU and WHUT.

### **About American Graduate**

*American Graduate: Let's Make it Happen* was launched in 2011 with 25 public media stations in high need communities to spotlight the high school dropout crisis and focus on middle and high school student interventions. Today, more than 100 public radio and television stations in over 30 states are working with over 1000 community organizations and schools, as well as Alma and Colin Powell's America's Promise Alliance, Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University School of Education, Alliance for Excellent Education, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and Newman’s Own Foundation to help the nation achieve a 90% graduation by 2020.

With primetime and children’s programming that educates, informs, and inspires public radio and television stations — locally owned and operated — are important resources in helping to increase dialogue and help communities address critical issues. According to a report from the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University School of Education, American Graduate stations have told the story about the dropout crisis in a way that empowered citizens to get involved and helped community organizations break down silos to work more effectively together.

**About CPB**

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a private, nonprofit corporation created by Congress in 1967, is the steward of the federal government's investment in public broadcasting. It helps support the operations of more than 1,400 locally-owned and operated public television and radio stations nationwide, and is the largest single source of funding for research, technology, and program development for public radio, television and related online services.

**About Youth Speaks**

Youth Speaks is the leading presenter of spoken word education and youth development programs in the U.S. With ongoing, comprehensive programs in the San Francisco Bay Area serving 45,000 youth locally and national programs that serve over 250,000, Youth Speaks facilitates safe spaces within and outside of public institutions where youth can critically analyze, write and voice their own experiences through this powerful artistic medium to thousands of their peers. Each year, Youth Speaks organizes and hosts the Brave New Voices Festival, the home of the national youth poetry slam. In 2009 and 2010, Brave New Voices was featured on HBO.

**About the Will and Jada Smith Family Foundation**

Dedicated to the betterment of the world around us, the Will and Jada Smith Family Foundation helps individuals and organizations advance in areas where need is great. Education, empowerment and health are the foundation's core platform. The WJSFF is proud to lend its support for education through programs and partnerships to support community development, sustainability and the arts.

**About Philanthropy at AT&T**

AT&T Inc. is committed to advancing education, strengthening communities and improving lives. Through its community initiatives, AT&T has a long history of investing in projects that create learning opportunities; promote academic and economic achievement; or address community needs. In 2013, more than \$130 million was contributed or directed through corporate-, employee-, social investment- and AT&T Foundation-giving programs. AT&T Aspire is AT&T's signature education initiative that drives innovation in education by bringing diverse resources to bear on the issue including funding, technology, employee volunteerism, and mentoring.

**ATTENTION CALENDAR EDITORS****What:**

RAISE UP – YOUNG PEOPLE TAKING ON THE DROP OUT CRISIS

Presented by Youth Speaks in partnership with The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts Millennium Stage

**Hosted by: Glynn Washington of NPR's Snap Judgment**

**Featuring:** Five winners of the **American Graduate Raise Up** project, Hill Harper, Gabriel "Asheru" Benn, Black Thought and DJ Questlove

**When:**

Sunday, September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014

Show: 6:00pm

Cost: Free

**Where:**

The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C.—Concert Hall

##